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# LOVE and the PRINCESSES

*Lucille Iremonger*

16 pages of halftone illustrations  
and 4 line drawings

Lucille Iremonger has written in *Love and the Princesses* a brilliant piece of historical detection. Queen Victoria's aunt, Princess Sophia, is said to have borne an illegitimate son, Tommy Garth, who later blackmailed the royal family about the secret of his birth.

It is this rumor which caused Mrs. Iremonger to pursue for her own satisfaction, in published and unpublished sources, the truth behind this unlikely story. In unraveling this strange yarn, the author has created a book which probes deep into human nature and English history.

The search, which began with an alleged love affair between Princess

*(Continued on back flap)*

*Jacket design by BEN FEDER, INC.*







# *Love and the Princesses*







Princess Sophia  
(*Anthony Stewart*)

LOVE  
*and the*  
PRINCESSES

---

Lucille Iremonger

THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY

Established 1834

New York

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## TO MY HUSBAND

τοὺς μὲν νεὼς τοῖς θεοῖς προσήκει  
καθιεροῦν, τοὺς δὲ ἄνδρας τοὺς  
ἐλλογίμους τῇ τῶν βιβλίων  
ἀναθέσει τιμᾶν.

*Aristides*





## *Preface*

---

I am very diffident about offering this little book to the public, and appalled at my own temerity in encroaching on the preserves of so many specialists.

Let me hasten to disclaim any pretensions. Though I seek truth and cherish accuracy I do not claim to be historian or specialist, nor do I write here for historians and specialists. This is the merest piece of amateur detective work, undertaken for my own pleasure, which I hope may entertain one or two others.

I am sorry that I am not able to tell all that I know. I have been the recipient of generous disclosures, but only under the seal of secrecy. However, I hope that what I have set forth in this book may not be without value or interest to those with an appreciative eye for the vagaries of human nature in general and of royalty in particular.

I have not, as will be seen, encumbered my pages with footnotes, or clogged the narrative with qualifying reservations and unvarying references to sources. I have also dared to use my discretion in the matter of spelling and punctuation in the extracts I have quoted, usually clarifying and simplifying, but sometimes retaining the odd individual peculiarity. And I have tried to avoid the confusing use of several titles for the same person, even at the expense of plumping for a nickname—a not entirely pleasing expedient, I admit.

I acknowledge with the warmest gratitude my indebtedness to those, many of them eminent in their fields, who have helped me with much personal kindness, and to the sources, published and unpublished, upon which I have drawn. So full is the documentation of this period, especially in published matter, that the lot of the enquirer, except in the vast amount to be covered, is not arduous. I am especially grateful to Miss

## PREFACE

Dorothy Margaret Stuart, who had access to the Royal Archives at Windsor when compiling her own *Daughters of George III*, and who has been most kind and patient in replying to all my many queries, in helping me to follow old trails, and in inviting me to examine material in her possession, some of it unpublished and unlikely to be published for one reason or another. Mr. Roger Fulford has also been most courteous in answering my questions concerning his published statements about Sophia's little story.

I also owe special thanks to Mr. C. d'O. Farran, B.C.L., LL.B., Ph.D., lecturer in law at the University of Liverpool, for contributing his excellent appendix on the Royal Marriages Act; to Lord Simonds for having so presciently put me on Mr. Farran's track; to Mr. Alan Godsall and Miss Grace Mary Godsall, the latter for freely making known to me family secrets concerning General and Tommy Garth, and the former for allowing pictures of them to be published for the first time—it is no fault of his that the General does not appear in this book, the family miniature having tragically been found to be missing when sought for; to Miss Brymer, present owner of General Garth's old home, Ilslington, for a hospitable welcome and photographs of Puddletown Church and the house; to Miss Madeleine de Soyres for permission to reproduce her delightful miniature of Princess Sophia, handed down in her family since the Princess first bestowed it; to Dr. Richard Hunter, M.D., M.R.C.P., D.P.M., and Dr. Ida MacAlpine, M.D., for sparing the time to discuss with me modern theories on the madness which afflicted King George III; to Dr. R. L. James, Ph.D., Head Master of Harrow; to Madame C. Rosselet, Director of the Bibliothèque Publique, Neuchâtel, for micro-filming for me the original text of the letter from Marianne Moula to Madame de Charrière; to Mr. Richard de la Mare of Faber and Faber, my publishers, for his constant encouragement; to Sir Edward Fellowes, K.C.B., C.M.G., M.C., Clerk of the House of Commons, for checking the proofs of my chapter on the tempestuous passage through Parliament of the Royal Marriages Bill; and, as always, to my husband, whose insight as an M.P. into political history and the workings of Parliament was of inestimable value to me.

Among those who have kindly given me permission to quote

## PREFACE

from their books are: Mr. Eric Gillett, and Messrs. Faber and Faber Ltd.; Dr. A. Aspinall, D. Litt., and Messrs. Home and van Thal Ltd.; Mr. Manfred S. Güttmacher, M.D., and Messrs. Charles Scribner's of New York; and Mr. Romney Sedgwick, C.M.G., and Messrs. Macmillan. I owe thanks to Dr. J. H. Plumb, Litt. D., and Messrs. Batsford Ltd., for help in tracing one or two illustrations, and to Prince Ernest of Hanover for the photograph he had specially taken for me of his painting of his ancestor the Duke of Cumberland, which appears in this book. I am grateful, too, to Mr. G. M. Willis, not only for the facts revealed in his recent life of Cumberland, but for the notes prepared since its publication which he kindly sent to me.

I must also thank Lord Garvagh, for matter of interest concerning General Sir Brent Spencer; Mrs. Evelyn Tollemache for information about her Fitz Roy connections and family legends; Canon T. W. Page-Phillips, Vicar of Puddletown, the Rev. Maurice Garner, Rector of Melcombe Regis Church, and the Rev. J. C. Blackburn, Methodist Superintendent Minister at Weymouth, for supplying details which saved me much trouble. The editor of *The Lancet*, Dr. Cuthbert E. Dukes, O.B.E., M.D., Secretary of the Section of the History of Medicine at the Royal Society of Medicine, Mr. A. Dickson Wright, M.S., F.R.C.S., and Dr. E. Ashworth Underwood, B.Sc., M.D., D.P.H., F.L.S., Director of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, all aided me in my medical enquiries; and if my search for the famous lost box of papers proved fruitless it was no fault of the Institute of Bankers, Messrs. Coutts and Co., or Westminster Bank Ltd.

I have naturally much for which to thank Sir Owen Morshead, G.C.V.O., D.S.O., M.C., Librarian at Windsor Castle, and Mr. Scott-Elliot, the Keeper of Prints and Drawings there, as well as Sir Terence Nugent, G.C.V.O., M.C., the Comptroller, the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Brigadier Ivan De La Bere, C.V.O., C.B.E., the Secretary of the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, was helpful, and so were the officials of the Public Record Office in my visits to examine documents and papers, and those at the British Museum Newspaper Library at Colindale, and at the Principal Probate Registry, Somerset House. At the British Museum itself I am specially indebted to Sir

## PREFACE

Thomas Kendrick, K.C.B., the Director, for making the rough ways smooth. Mr. Oliver Millar, M.V.O., F.S.A., Deputy Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures, was good enough to let me know of the sudden appearance in the auction rooms of the unknown miniature of Princess Augusta alleged to have been taken from Brent Spencer's neck, and Sir Alec Martin and Mr. Guy Hannen, M.C., of Christie's, co-operated most charmingly in helping me to investigate its history and reproduce it. Mr. Kingsley Adams of the National Portrait Gallery went to considerable trouble on my behalf, and in fact the same is true of many others whom I am sorry not to be able to name. I cannot, however, omit my acknowledgment of all that I owe to the staff of Chelsea Library, with especial reference to Miss Sheila Palmer, who have once again performed miracles to enable me to work with rare books in the peace and quiet of my own home.

Cheyne Row,  
Chelsea, S.W.3

L.I.

*June, 1958*

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PRINCESS SOPHIA

*frontispiece*

*By kind permission of Miss Madeleine de Soyres*

*Following page 96*

KING GEORGE III, QUEEN CHARLOTTE,  
LORD NORTH AND OTHERS

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QUEEN CHARLOTTE IN 1793

*By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen*

THE ROYAL FAMILY AT WINDSOR IN 1779

*By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen*

KING GEORGE III IN HIS LAST ILLNESS

*By kind permission of the trustees of the British Museum*

THE PRINCESS ROYAL

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PRINCESS AUGUSTA

*By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen*

GENERAL SIR BRENT SPENCER AND PRINCESS  
AUGUSTA

*With acknowledgments to Smythies' 'Historical Records' and by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen*

## ILLUSTRATIONS

PRINCESS ELIZABETH

*By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen*

PRINCESS MARY

*By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen*

PRINCESS AMELIA

*By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen*

THE DUKE OF SUSSEX

*By kind permission of the National Portrait Gallery*

WESTMACOTT, EDITOR OF THE *Age*

*From a drawing by Daniel Maclise for Fraser's Magazine*

SIR HERBERT TAYLOR

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TOMMY GARTH IN 1839

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THE DUKE OF CUMBERLAND

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THE DUKE OF YORK

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PART I

*The Royal Omnibus*



## CHAPTER 1

### *A Royal Secret*

---

I don't remember when I first came upon the story of Princess Sophia. Perhaps it was on one of those sublime Oxford afternoons when, reaching down the wrong book from the library shelves, one is seduced into the half-guilty delights of irrelevant reading.

I remember very well where I came across her again, however. It was a year or two ago, in a small newspaper which finds its haphazard way to me across the world. My eye was caught by the remembered name, and I began to read her story again.

I wondered, for the second time, how it had come to be forgotten; for it seemed just the sort of romantic tale that our people love to keep alive. The writer of the article obviously shared my views, for he sought to retell the story in the idiom of the cinema and of modern popular romantic fiction.

'In the year 1801,' he wrote, 'dewy-eyed, lovely and a little delicate, Princess Sophia was almost exactly the age of our Princess Margaret today, and the two bear an astonishing family likeness. Sophia was the youngest but one of George III's six daughters and the adored pet of her seven elder brothers. Like a nun among movie-stars, she lived in a constant whirl of romantic intrigues, startling love-affairs and high-speed flirtations. But these episodes always centred around her brothers and sisters, and never herself.'

'Tired of constantly playing go-between and gooseberry,' this 'nun among movie-stars,' Sophia, 'began to feel she was on the shelf'. Then, 'with firework swiftness,' she was 'thrown into the company of a man much older than herself,' and, of course, 'fell madly in love'. Her lover was an equerry of her father's, and the two were thrown together at Windsor, where 'in the moonlight they were able to meet, pouring out their hearts,

## A ROYAL SECRET

their hopes of love'. In due course a son was born to Sophia. Some sort of ceremony took place at some time, 'a wedding without bells, and apparently without banns', according to my newspaper, where the groom resembled the equerry and the bride was disguised in countrywoman's clothes.

The climax of the story, however, came thirty years later, when the son, by then a Captain in the army, successfully and profitably blackmailed the royal family.

The idiom in which all this was recounted, as much as the details themselves, aroused my interest. In perfect good faith, no doubt, the writer of the article had, I felt, held up a distorting mirror to his subject—irrespective of whether the facts he set down were accurate or not. I doubted whether it had all been quite like that.

I allowed myself to wonder also whether those facts as stated were to be relied upon. One or two little questions bothered me even in my comparative ignorance. Surely, for example, no marriage, secret or otherwise, of a young princess at that time could be valid without the King's consent? Yet the lovers were supposed to have been married. Then, again, if they had been married, what grounds could there have been for this mysterious and triumphant blackmail? The gaps in this story were, to my mind, more thought-provoking than the revelations set forth, and it might be instructive to probe a little further.

I went to a contemporary source or two.

Almost at once I stumbled on something very ugly, uglier even than blackmail. It seemed that it had been said in Sophia's lifetime, and was undoubtedly believed (though some rejected the suggestion with contempt), that the father of her son was not the equerry but her own brother, the Duke of Cumberland.

At that stage I almost abandoned poor Sophia. Yet on second thoughts it seemed to me that this would be uncharitable, not to say churlish, treatment, of a piece with the kind she had all too often had, in life and after death. If Sophia had been the innocent victim of so terrible a slander that no writer dared to have any but the most hasty and distant dealings with her, then surely her story was only the more dramatic and exceptional, and she only the more deserving of my attention? So I set out to find out the truth about Sophia and her son, in so far as it was possible for me to do so after so great a lapse of time.

## A ROYAL SECRET

I set out, as I said, to seek out the story of Little Sophy and her son; and I have written an essay on the Royal Marriages Act, and its causes, and their results on the lives of the daughters of George III, with especial reference to the mystery of Princess Sophia.

That was how it had to be. It was impossible, I found from the outset, to disengage this trivial-seeming story, at first sight a private and personal affair, irresponsible and almost irrelevant, from those important happenings which go under the name of history. Fragile as some delicate parasite, its roots were bound firmly round the stout branches of its host, and sometimes struck deep into them.

Almost at once I left the staircase in the moonlight for the world of men struggling for power of one kind or another, for one reason or another. It would be going too far to lay the blame for the romantic vagary and its unfortunate results directly on the shoulders of monarchs, law-makers, politicians and even physicians, rather than on those more obviously concerned. Yet I believe that those who care to follow me in these pages may find themselves in sympathy with me in my surprise at the strength and the narrowness of the cage into which circumstances, which had been building up over many generations, had placed Sophia. We are all caught in the cage of history and in the trap of circumstance, and princesses, we are told, always more inexorably so than ordinary women. Never, perhaps, was this truer than of the daughters of George III; and for Sophia, possibly, the results were saddest of all.

Sophia herself was a heroine of the first water. Not only was she sensitive, witty and warm-hearted, mercurial, unexpected and humorous, but she was beautiful. She was kind. She was seductive. She was very intelligent—and she was universally loved. In short, she was enchanting.

I approached my search for the truth with two simple questions.

The first question was, How could such a thing have happened? By 'such a thing' I meant the tragedy by which a princess, young and beautiful, and intelligent and beloved and carefully guarded, could be 'ruined' like any teeny in a Victorian novel—so ruined that she must live out her life as neither maid, wife nor widow and be buried officially a spinster. How

## A ROYAL SECRET

different is the prospect one envisages for the young, fair daughter of a mighty king of England! One does not have to be immoderately romantic to picture as the natural course of events that a suitable young prince from overseas should have borne her off at an early age to a life at once royal and respectable.

The second question with which I armed myself was, How could they have said such a thing? And by 'such a thing' I meant the monstrous suggestion made about her son's parentage. That the suggestion was believed, not hesitantly, nor by one or two, but widely and with conviction by the whole nation, needed at least some explanation.

All the other questions would be answered as we went, no doubt, but these two were, I believed, at the heart of the matter.

In the next chapter, in seeking the answer to my first question, I begin with the beginnings: not with Sophia, but with her father, and his father, and his father, and his father before him. For it all started a long way back.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Sophia's Forefathers*

---

**T**he search for an answer to the question, How could such a thing have happened? leads directly to Sophia's father, King George III. In the end it was his character, and consequently his actions, and even his moods, which together formed the most important of all the forces which acted upon her life.

In order to understand George III himself it is not unrepaying to glance for a moment further back still.

In an elaborate study of the king, an American psychiatrist, Dr. Manfred Güttmacher, opens with this quotation from Oliver Wendell Holmes:

'We are all omnibuses in which our ancestors ride, and every now and then one of them sticks his head out and embarrasses us.'

An assortment of interesting but mightily embarrassing passengers rode in that royal omnibus, George III.

His father was acknowledged by all to be a sensual, self-indulgent and inadequate person, who quarrelled bitterly with his father, and soured his wife's view of life by his crude unfaithfulness. He was also brave. He was Frederick, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of King George II.

He was a small, frail man, who had meekly obeyed when his father had ordered him to give up his betrothed with the caustic observation, 'I did not think ingrafting my half-witted coxcomb upon a mad woman would improve the breed.' He was the man who dutifully married a tall, awkward, long-nosed and long-necked German princess, still playing in public with her dolls, and so homesick that her governess had to be sent for—that Augusta, Princess of Wales, who put aside her dolls, grew bitter and dominating, and achieved the distinction of being one of the most venomously hated women in England.

He was the man who, though kind and affectionate to this

## SOPHIA'S FOREFATHERS

wife, continually insulted her, even making her midwife, Mrs. Cannon, his mistress. 'The chief passion of the prince', Walpole said of him, 'was women, but like the rest of his race, beauty was not a necessary ingredient.'

He was the prince with a taste for literature and literary men, the lover of private theatricals, the composer of bad verses, who also delighted in the lowest company, in bull-baitings, and in visits to Norwood Forest to consult fortune-tellers.

He was the man who gambled compulsively, and failed to pay his debts of honour.

He was the man whom all his biographers call weak, vain, obstinate, lying, unstable, sensual and, above all, susceptible to flattery. Yet he was also a good father, conscientious and forbearing, one who strove without hypocrisy to inculcate in his offspring the virtues that were lacking in himself. He was the man who died suddenly at the age of forty-eight.

He was the man who was contemptuously dismissed even in his funeral sermon, and forgotten as soon as dead. He was 'Poor Fred', the father of George III.

Poor Fred's father, George III's grandfather, has also been freely admitted by historians and biographers to have borne an unenviable character: that of an obstinate, self-indulgent and miserly little martinet, with insatiable sexual appetites.

He was the man who left the running of his kingdom to his wife and Sir Robert Walpole, while he sauntered his days away, and was stupid enough to believe that nobody guessed at the true state of affairs. He was the man, at once shy and arrogant, of whom Lord Chesterfield said, 'He loved to act the king, but mistook the part.'

He was the man who kicked the shins and punched the faces of his doctors; who struck his tongue-tied grandson of eighteen for his ignorance of English and Hanoverian history; and who often vented his childish tempers on his hat or his wig.

He was the man who ordered his whole life to a barren, if well-regulated routine, rising early, taking a great deal of exercise and almost starving himself to keep his weight down, insisting on punctuality to the moment, working meticulously on his accounts, and reducing even his mistress to her precise place in his timetable: for he would wait, watch in hand, for the stroke of nine before going to Lady Suffolk's apartments every evening.



## SOPHIA'S FOREFATHERS

For ever fussing about petty things, looking (as Lady Mary Montagu said) 'on all the men and women he saw as creatures he might kick or kiss for his diversion', like some serjeant-major in a crown, he was at once scorned and feared by those who had to obey him.

He was mean. He was the man who haggled like a peasant, who repaid his first minister for invaluable services with a cracked diamond, who charged his wife with the feed for a team of horses which he had presented to her but used himself, and who alarmed the young women he pursued by counting and recounting his money before their eyes.

He was the man who wrote sixty-page letters to his wife from his electorate of Hanover, where he greatly preferred to live, describing every detail in the notorious progress of his latest amorous adventure. 'Love the Walmoden,' he implored her, 'for she loves me.' He was the husband of a wife who, though brilliant, beautiful and his friend, was capable of replying, 'I am but one woman and an old woman, and you may love more and younger women.' He was the man who, in testimony to his fidelity, could blubber in answer to his dying Queen's pleas to him to remarry, '*Non, j'aurai des maîtresses.*' (Her reply was a resigned, worldly, '*Cela n'empêche pas.*')

He was the father who conducted an even more bitter personal feud against his son than had his own father against him; who said to Lord Hervey, 'My dear first-born is the greatest beast in the whole world and I most heartily wish he were out of it'; and who forbade him to come to his mother's death-bed.

He was the man who upbraided his dying wife with the words, 'Your eyes are like those of a cow whose throat has just been cut.'

He was the man, too, who grieved uncontrollably after her death, kept her room exactly as it was, and commanded that the sides be removed from his and his wife's coffins when he should follow her, so that their earthly dust might be mingled for ever.

He was an honest man. He was a patron of Handel. He was the man who damned 'the boets and the bainters too', to Hogarth.

He was the man whose special delight was in military uniforms and accoutrements, in general, and in his own regiment of guards in particular; and whose frustrated ambition was to have an army like that of his brother-in-law, Frederick of Prussia. He

## SOPHIA'S FOREFATHERS

was the man who in youth led a famous cavalry charge under Marlborough; who in middle age challenged Frederick to meet him in single combat; and who at the age of sixty, on the field of Dettingen, when unhorsed, led the charge on foot, bidding his men fire for the honour of England.

Such was George II, and he was, for all his father's suspicions to the contrary, a true son of George I: for he too was a man of brutish insensitivity and insatiable sexuality, combined with a bewildering, contradictory sentimentality.

His father, George I, had been a man who could heartlessly banish his young wife, Sophia Dorothea of Zelle, for an indiscretion, condemn her to a lifetime of imprisonment in a German castle, and set his face implacably against all pleas for humanity, let alone mercy, towards her, for thirty-two years; and then, at the end, go into a morbid decline of grief over her death.

He was the man who brought over with him from Hanover two 'old ugly trulls', one tall, thin and bony, and little more than idiot; the other so monstrously fat that she threw Horace Walpole as a boy into a fright. 'No woman came amiss to him if they were very willing and very fat . . .' Lord Chesterfield commented. 'The standard of His Majesty's taste made all those ladies who aspired to his favour, and who were near the suitable size, strain and swell themselves like the frogs in the fable to rival the bulk and dignity of the ox. Some succeeded and others burst.'

He was a man of simple tastes, who, bred a soldier, and very shy, preferred to live in two rooms and be looked after by Mohammed and Mustapha, his two servants whom he had captured as a young man in a campaign against the Turks.

He was a stubborn, quarrelsome and stingy man, who, in the course of his feud with his son, imprisoned him in St. James's Palace, released him only when his ministers cited the Habeas Corpus Act, seized his grandchildren from their parents—and then charged them for their children's keep.

He was at best 'an honest, dull, German gentleman, as unfit as unwilling to act the part of a king'. Chesterfield, who knew him well for forty years, could give him no more than that, and it is high and tolerant praise considering the man he was.

So there we have the three immediate male forebears in the male line of King George III.

## SOPHIA'S FOREFATHERS

King George I was a weak, inadequate, brave, obstinate, stupid, shy, indolent, sensual, cruel, quarrelsome, stingy and complex man.

King George II was a weak, inadequate, brave, obstinate, stupid, shy, physically energetic but mentally indolent, sensual, rather cruel, quarrelsome, miserly and complex man.

Prince Frederick Louis was a weak, inadequate, brave, obstinate, mentally retarded, shy, indolent, sensual, quarrelsome and complex man, kind to his children but to his wife inconsiderate to the point of callousness.

We might, then, not be unduly surprised to find that King George III was a weak, inadequate, brave, obstinate, stupid, shy, indolent, sensual, mentally unstable, quarrelsome, stingy and complex man. As indeed he was.

The whole trend of the life of King George III, however, as we all doubtless recall, was very different from those of his predecessors. Any switch, however strong, can be bent, and the more elastic the switch the further it will bend before it breaks. Perhaps there never was a nature so far bent out of its natural growth as that of George III. That it was an unnatural distortion of a strong inclination there is ample evidence.

The twin forces which were brought to bear on the father of Princess Sophia in his youth and early manhood, and which affected his strongly-moulded personality so powerfully, were his mother, Princess Augusta, and her friend Lord Bute.

Princess Augusta had been half-crazed by her husband's unexpected death, which left her with eight children and one to be born posthumously. At a sudden stroke the glorious prospect of being Queen of England had been snatched from her. Her only importance from that moment on was as the mother of the next king, and she turned to the task of moulding the twelve-year-old boy into the kind of king, and (even more important) the kind of son as king, she desired, with an almost frightening determination.

Augusta had a policy, and she had begun to put it into action even before the death of her Poor Fred. She had been so angered and wounded by his infidelities, so contemptuous of his weaknesses, so scornful of the coarse, sensual old King, her father-in-law, that she had made up her mind to form her son into a totally

## SOPHIA'S FOREFATHERS

different kind of being. He should be moral, pious, uninterested in women, and revolted by low company, gambling, drink and any form of dissipation. He should be tied to his mother's apron-strings, though allowed his own way where it could do no harm. 'George, be a king!' she is said to have abjured him frequently. At the same time she tacitly forbade him to be a man.

Augusta's methods were simple, and negative. She employed spiritual antiseptics to keep the atmosphere pure. Constructive only in vaguely-expressed aspiring notions, she was decisive enough when it came to forbidding anything which looked like giving pleasure, or even relaxation.

Prince George and his eight brothers and sisters lived almost entirely to themselves, for she 'really was afraid', she said, to have any of the profligate young people of good family near them. She allowed them only the simplest entertainments, such as a game of baseball or pushpin, and (perhaps urged on by her theatre-loving husband) an occasional family production of a play. The children called in to act any parts not taken by her sons and daughters were picked with extreme care.

In all this Augusta had as her eager ally a man then unknown to the public and ignored by his peers: the Scottish nobleman, John Stuart, Earl of Bute.

The world suspected that Bute was the lover of the Princess of Wales, and hated them both for it. These feelings were expressed by the periodic burning of symbolic effigies in the shape of a jackboot (John, or Jack, Bute) and a petticoat. Bute was an acknowledgedly handsome man, with a well-turned leg, of which both he and she were inordinate admirers, and he shared the Princess of Wales's passion for botany, which flowered so happily in the gardens at Kew. Other such affairs have been built on less solid foundations. Walpole said that he was as sure the two were lovers as if he had seen them in bed together. Yet it is possible the world and he may have both been wrong, for Augusta had a good reason for keeping Lord Bute constantly about her and giving him access to her private ear. Her eldest son was so backward as to seem almost a moron.

No governor or tutor could do anything with the prince. No one could even command his passing attention. Prince George of England was an unhappy boy, obviously what we have learned today to call a maladjusted child. Dull-witted and apathetic,

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despised by his impatient mother, perpetually nagged by both parents and all his tutors, and, worse than all, always compared to his disadvantage with a brighter younger brother (the usual pattern in his family, and one to crop up again in the next generation), his days were a misery to be lived through somehow or other.

In the year 1957, as we read the *Report of the Committee on Maladjusted Children*, the result of five years research, published by the Ministry of Education, we begin at last to comprehend what lies behind such listlessness and lack of concentration as his. 'The child sits through the lesson with a glassy stare and never shows any feeling or animation. He appears not to be trying, but is in fact, like the stammerer, trying too hard, and has built up a tension which prevents knowledge from penetrating.' In 1757, and the years immediately preceding, the prince's behaviour was called laziness, or worse. 'Idleness, sir,' thundered George's exasperated sub-preceptor, 'yours is not idleness! Your brother Edward is idle, but one must not call being asleep all day being idle!'

George had a peculiar stammering way of speaking, too, which grew into the famous speech eccentricities of his manhood, and which made him almost incomprehensible to those unused to him—the gobble-gobble, the machine-gun fire of questions allowing no time for answers, the pepperings of *eh? eh?*, *what! what!* and *eh? what!* He did not learn to write until he was eleven; and up to the age of eighteen his last governor described him as averse from work, indifferent to pleasure, usually in a state of total inaction, and for all practical purposes still in the nursery.

Lord Bute not only gained the interest of this difficult, almost impossible, boy; he won his heart completely. He broke down the terrible tensions which were destroying his pupil, and thawed the heart which had been almost frozen by lack of affection. If he had been content to let his good work rest there we should owe him only thanks.

To Bute George listened, and for Bute George strove mightily. This 'neurotic boy, bitter in soul and mentally undeveloped', 'this unbalanced tortured mind . . . this poor, unripe under-developed boy', as Sir Lewis Namier has called him, was the Caliban to Bute's Prospero, but without Caliban's independence

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of spirit. Unhappily the picture of George III as a young man which emerges from the ten-year-long correspondence between him and the man to whom he abandoned his heart, his will, his personality and his kingdom is that of a rather nauseating youth: cringing, self-castigatory and servile to the gloomy dominie, violent and insolent towards men more worthy of his respect, and embarrassingly emotional about everything. 'Steadiness' was a quality much admired in that age, George was not steady. If Bute obviously enjoyed applying the whip, George seemed to take an unhealthy pleasure in receiving the lash.

We find ourselves comparing this prince unfavourably with the spirited and self-reliant girl, Victoria, his grand-daughter-to-be. She would come confidently to the throne three years younger than he was at his accession, at an age when he was still whimpering after one of Bute's curtain lectures his belief that unless he did exactly as he was told he would 'inevitably sink', and that if he were forced to mount the throne without his friend's help, he would 'undoubtedly be in the most dreadful of situations'.

At every turn he calls Bute his Dearest and his Dearest Friend. He believes that he has been sent by 'the Great Power above' to conduct him through 'this difficult road', and to 'bring me to the goale'. He swears that he esteems his Friend far beyond 'the greatest of stakes', his Crown. He feverishly reassures him that even marriage will not alter his affection for him. If Bute should 'set him adrift' then he would refuse his throne.

'I would therefore, in such an unhappy case,' he says, 'retire to some distant region where in solitude I might for the rest of my life remain and think on the various faults I have committed that I might repent of them.'

Year after year such sentiments are repeated in the correspondence, and year after year George worries over Bute's sore throats and other minor ailments, and lovingly dwells on the most intimate details of the bedchamber concerning their treatment. All he cares about, he says frankly, is the health of his hero, and his most exalted flights are often abruptly rounded off by an inquiry after the state of Bute's 'bowells'.

What was Bute really like?

He was certainly an ambitious and a jealous man, who hid his

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ambition and his jealousy and his lack of outstanding ability under a cloak of piety, simplicity, humility, disinterestedness and transparent honesty.

He was forever protesting the nobility of his nature, the purity of his motives, the fidelity of his heart, and the altruism of his desires, while contrasting them almost venomously with the ingratitude, avarice, ambition, and love of evil blackening the hearts of every other living human being in the nation. Only George's mother was exempted from such strictures; George himself was not.

He was forever ringing on the table the sterling worth of his friendship and his honour, forever proclaiming that his heart was broken and his health ruined by his self-sacrificing service to his country, and, above all, to his beloved and respected prince; and forever threatening, like some horrible old flirt, to abandon him to the terrible fate he had painted so vividly for him.

Lord Bute could be called with some justice an unctuous, pompous, pretentious and theatrical humbug, with an eye cocked to the main chance.

His unpopularity was, none the less, a thousand times worse than he deserved. Those who hated Bute for his influence were in reality beating their heads against the brick wall of circumstance. Bute was the scapegoat. The cause was a wretchedly unhappy boy whose abilities were too poor for any task but that of a farmer's lad, and who was born to be a king. Even his mother, Augusta, was not to blame. She was only a stupid woman facing with some courage an impossible situation. Least of all was George to blame.

No wonder if this poor, fatherless, mother-stifled boy ('fit for nothing but to read the Bible to his mother', according to his grandfather), this very ignorant prince, all too aware that he was without charm, lightness, wit, or what the age called parts, but with an earnest desire to be good and deserving of his tremendous heritage, accepted the help of the handsome, virtuous, graceful, and accomplished man who offered to stand his friend and see him through all his troubles.

It is not surprising either that this poor boy was soon reduced to a state of gibbering self-distrust and almost hysterical dependence on so determined and self-satisfied a mentor. His hectic declarations of love, his fevered inquiries after Bute's health,

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his sobbing anxiety at the repeated threats to abandon him, like his offensive vilifications of men like Pitt, and his violent insistence that Bute was the only honest man in the nation, may not make pretty reading, but they should command only our pity. He was a child walking blindfold through a tunnel full of traps and terrors, and whistling through chattering teeth the tune he was told to whistle. Like his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather before him, he was a very brave boy.

Far more surprising, and worthy of admiration in every sense of the word, is that this young man ever brought himself, in his own phrase, to 'act the manly part'. Eventually he was to destroy Bute's letters and avoid any mention of that former intimacy, even deceiving himself that some matters of fact had been other than they were. Before that time came, however, Bute's ambitions would have attained their peak. For a giddy moment of triumph he would have held the office of Prime Minister, or, as it was then called, First Lord of the Treasury.

In the years during which Bute dominated him, and which lasted roughly from the Prince's twelfth to the King's twenty-eighth year, he undoubtedly did some good. He constantly exhorted him to piety and virtue, to morality, integrity, veracity, justice, benevolence, economy and the love of peace. To Bute we owe much. How can we regret that the old royal family tradition was blown sky-high? How can we repine that King George III, for the first time, set the example of royal domestic bliss? A laughing-stock to the upper classes, he would see the day when it could be claimed that it was the virtues of the family at Kew which had saved England from the fate of France.

On George himself, however, the years which the locust Bute had eaten were to leave their mark in less happy ways.

If Bute freed his pupil from some tensions it was only to introduce new ones. Bute's teaching, far from counteracting, cruelly emphasized his hereditary shyness, conscientiousness and fear of inadequacy. Other hereditary traits, unusually strong in his line, were crushed back unnaturally. Under Bute's tutelage he became solitary, mistrustful, narrow-minded, self-opinionated, obdurate and smug.

He was taught to hate and not to love. He was trained to appear something he was not, and never shown how to live the part. He was full of guilt, yet believed that God was always on



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his side. Inspired by the ideals held up before him, he struggled, daily, hourly, blindly, to be not merely a super-monarch but a super-man.

The struggle, for one of George's heredity, and of his capacity, was formidable. The ill-equipped boy was attempting a task which might have proved impossible for a man of great power, strong character and remarkable gifts.

The mental strait-jacket was never to be thrown off—in normal life. It was to affect not only his own life and that of his wife, but the lives of his children and all royal children to come.

Sir Lewis Namier has wondered 'whether it would not have been better for England had the Prince of Wales had a gay mistress instead of a sententious preceptor, wrongly described as a "favourite".' It is a cynical suggestion. Whatever the results for England might have been, however, we may say with some confidence that, strangely enough, such an arrangement would have been better for his daughters.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Love and Her Father*

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YOU have often accused me of growing grave and thoughtful. It is entirely owing to a daily encreasing admiration of the fair sex, which I am attempting with all the philosophy and resolution I am capable of to keep under. I should be ashamed after having so long resisted the charms of those divine creatures now to become their prey.'

So wrote Prince George to his Dearest Friend, one evening, 'near twelve'. Naturally there were no secrets from Bute, not even the most intimate.

'When I have said this,' his letter goes on, 'you will plainly feel how strong a struggle there is between the boiling youth of 21 years and prudence. The last, I hope, will ever keep the upper hand. Indeed, if I can weather it but a few years, marriage will put a stop to this combat in my breast.'

George ends by resolving to keep his mind constantly occupied with other matters, in order to keep 'those passions in due subordination'.

Already, long before this letter was written, George had become sentimentally, if innocently, involved with several young women. Even when what he once called the 'follies of youth' were held in proper subjugation, there were other people concerned to stir up trouble, or rather romance, on his behalf.

He had been only seventeen when his grandfather, the King, whom he had been brought up to consider a wicked schemer and his greatest enemy, had tried to marry him off to one of the daughters of the Duchess of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, whom he had discovered in his beloved electorate, Hanover. Augusta had fought against the match and, as Walpole put it, 'her ladyship's boy declared violently against being be-Wolfenbüttled'.

Next, of his own volition, at the age of eighteen, he had fallen in love, his first love, with that Eliza whose name was to be

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kept close in his heart, and to mean so much to his family in years to come. This was Lady Elizabeth Spencer, daughter of the third Duke of Marlborough, and she was tall and stately and virtuous, an acknowledged beauty of a rather solemn kind. Hardly were George's boiling passions aroused before she was married, with what may have been intentional haste, to Henry Herbert, the tenth Earl of Pembroke.

Lady Elizabeth was unlucky. Six years later her Earl ran away with a Miss Hunt, charmingly—but surely unnecessarily?—disguised as a sailor. Clearly he had little use for stateliness and virtue, in himself or in others. George's Eliza kept her queenly good looks to a mature age. Whether she guessed, or was told of, the ardour which had glowed so warmly, and was perhaps never extinguished, in the breast of the prince who became her King, we do not know.

Whatever he felt about his grandfather's plans (and he so feared his matrimonial machinations that he swore that he would never marry until 'this Old Man' were dead) George was far from averse to the idea of marriage itself. Soon, no doubt having reconciled himself to the permanent loss of his Eliza, he was in love again. This was his celebrated affair with Lady Sarah Lennox, and it is worth looking at it again in the light of the letters he wrote to Lord Bute at the time, and which are now fortunately available to us after having lain hidden for far too long.

Lady Sarah Lennox was only fifteen when she appeared at court in November 1759.

'Ideas of 15 and of 60', Lady Sarah was to write forty-five years later, 'one cannot well assimilate, but mine began at 14, for if you remember I was not near 15 when my poor head began to be turned by adulation in consequence of my supposed favour. In the year 1759, on the late Princess of Wales' birthday, 30 of November, I ought to have been in my nursery, and I shall ever think it was unfair to bring me into the world a child.'

This Juliet, to whom George promptly began to play a rather inept and oafish Romeo, was the sister of the Duke of Richmond, and a great-grand-daughter of Charles II by his liaison with Louise de Querouaille. Her father, the second Duke, and her mother, had both died before she was six.

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This love-affair will bear comparison with the story of Romeo and Juliet in more than the little matter of Lady Sarah's extreme youth, for her family and George's hated each other as sincerely as did the Montagues and Capulets. The Lennoxes were members of the oligarchy of great Whig families which ruled England and were anathema to Augusta, her son George and Bute. Worse, Lady Sarah herself was the adored protégée of that charming, corrupt and sinister figure, Henry Fox, afterwards the first Lord Holland, detested by George for his sins both private and public, and regarded as a declared enemy of his and his mother's and Bute's.

Henry Fox was the closest and most influential relation in Lady Sarah's life. Not only was he her brother-in-law, having made a runaway match with her sister, Lady Caroline, but Holland House was a home to her, where he was the father and his wife more a mother than a sister to her. There, too, she formed the strong close friendship with Lady Susan Fox-Strangways, his niece, which was never to be broken.

Not only, then, did the pretty child who attracted George's modestly averted eyes come from what he and his mother and Bute regarded as a nest of scorpions. Augusta, besides, had very obstinate ideas about a suitable bride for the King, her son, and, as it has been put, 'would as soon have seen her son married to a negress as to an Englishwoman, no matter how well-born'.

Lady Sarah was very pretty. She was 'as beautiful as girl could be', said her brother-in-law. 'Her beauty', he wrote, with an inarticulateness that is especially appealing coming from him, 'is not easily described otherwise than by saying she had the finest complexion, most beautiful hair, and prettiest person that ever was seen, with a sprightly and fine air, a pretty mouth, and remarkably fine teeth, and excess of bloom in her cheeks, little eyes—but this is not describing her, for her great beauty was a peculiarity of countenance, that made her at the same time different from and prettier than any other girl I ever saw.'

Sir Joshua Reynolds painted her some years later as a handsome woman with well-defined features and a kind face. In his picture she looks placid. It is hard to trace the spoiled and flighty little beauty of 1759.

Spoiled and flighty she was, though open and sweet-tempered

## LOVE AND HER FATHER

when she had her way, and, in the eyes of her ambitious relatives at least, maddeningly foolish. They set about securing the unexpected prize which seemed about to fall into the family lap with a businesslike efficiency and lack of squeamishness which is rather shocking to more sentimental (or more hypocritical) twentieth-century humans. For her part, Lady Sarah was far from averse to the thought of wearing a crown, but at the time she was busily engaged in a flirtation. It was, Fox said, 'really a commerce of vanity, not of love, on each side', with a young man who was 'a vain, insignificant puppy, lively and not ugly'. This was Lord Newbattle, son of the Marquess of Lothian, who 'made love to all the girls', and had piqued Lady Sarah's vanity by affecting to have fallen madly in love with one of her rivals.

Lady Sarah continued this flirtation even while, like some lovely decoy, she was being kept at Holland House whenever the Court was in London, and thrown into her royal admirer's path at every opportunity.

Augusta and Bute soon had wind of the affair, and were thrown into a state of unseemly panic. Lord Bute was plainly under orders to interrupt any conversation the royal lover might achieve with his Lady Sarah, and the Princess Dowager was reported to have thrust herself in Lady Sarah's way more than once and burst into an offensive laugh in her face.

The King, badly smitten, went so far as to make one or two strange proposals to Lady Sarah, using Lady Susan as a go-between, calculated to lead her on, but not to commit him.

The story runs, and it is vouched for by more than one source, that the King came up to Lady Susan one Thursday in March 1761, at a drawing-room, and asked her in a whisper if she did not think his forthcoming coronation would be a much finer sight if there were a queen at it. Wiser than he, she confined her answer to a simple, 'Yes.' Then he asked her if she did not know somebody who would grace that ceremony 'in the properest manner'. At this she was much embarrassed, thinking he was referring to her; but he bluntly explained 'I mean your friend, Lady Sarah Lennox. Tell her so; and let me have her answer the next drawing-room day.'

According to Henry Fox himself, the King then went across to Lady Sarah, 'bid her ask her friend what he had been saying, and make her tell her and tell all. She assur'd him she would.'

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In a state of agonized doubt between hope and despair Fox added to his account, 'H.M. is not given to joke. Is it serious? Strange if it is, and a strange way of going about it!'

Unfortunately, as he believed, for his hopes, Lady Sarah's brother, Lord George Lennox, and his wife, obviously mistaking the Romeo in the affair, lent her their help in escaping from Holland House to an early tryst in the park with Lord Newbattle. Henry Fox was convinced that Bute had learned of this imprudence, and put in a word where it would do most damage, or perhaps had even arranged for the King to eavesdrop on the trysters.

Whatever effect the affair had on George's feelings—it probably only caused some jealous pangs—it had an unfortunate one on Lady Sarah's treatment of him. The next drawing-room was held on a Sunday. George went across to Lady Sarah at once.

'Have you seen your friend lately?' he asked her, referring to Lady Susan.

'Yes,' she replied, with a shortness which would be considered rudeness if addressed to a fellow subject.

'Has she told you what I said to her?'

'Yes.'

'All?'

'Yes.'

'Do you approve?'

Lady Sarah made no answer, 'but', in Fox's words, 'look'd as cross as she could look. H.M. affronted, left her, seem'd confus'd, and left the drawing-room.'

Lady Sarah, it seems, had been crying all the morning, having been jilted by Newbattle on his parents' orders.

An unlucky riding accident, when Lady Susan's horse stumbled on a broken stone and fell, breaking her leg as he struggled to his feet, was used like a bludgeon by the impatient Fox. A sheet of paper in his handwriting, found among his letters to his wife, Lady Caroline, triumphantly details a conversation he forced upon the King about the suffering 'Lady Sal'—a callous record of the exchange, enlivened with his own asides of 'Now I have you!' and 'Thinks I, you shall hear of that again!' Fox, nervous as a poacher, made sure that, at the next drawing-room reception at which the King and Lady Sarah might meet, there should be no repetition of the kind of interchange which

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had taken place at their last *tête-à-tête*. Lady Sarah was rehearsed like an actress uncertain of her lines.

'God send that I may be enabled to go thro' with it!' she wrote to Lady Susan, 'I am allowed to mutter a little, provided the words *astonished*, *surprised*, *understand* and *meaning* are heard.'

By the time of the King's birthday ball—the first of the new reign, and therefore a specially magnificent one—on June 4th, Fox felt able to write, 'He is in love with her, and it is no less certain she loves him; and if she now ever thinks of Newbattle it is to vex and hate herself for the foolish transaction.'

'She won't look cross at the King when she sees him next week,' he wrote again, confidently. 'But', he worried, 'will he talk as kindly to her? He has undoubtedly heard of Lord Newbattle, and more than is true.' And he cursed the 'ridiculous German pride' of the royal family.

It was all wasted energy. The King, while leading Lady Sarah on, had been engaged in negotiations to marry a foreign princess. By the time Fox discovered the fact Lady Sarah was compromised beyond repair, and the King's marriage had already been announced to the nation.

Lady Sarah, despite gallant efforts at crying sour grapes, smarted under the insult for the remainder of her life. To herself and to Lady Susan, and to her family, as to the rest of the world, she was always to be the girl whom the King had jilted.

Fox, who never forgave the King, largely blamed Lady Sarah's meddling brother and his wife for the disaster. Today, however, we know more than Henry Fox ever did. We know that it was not Lord Newbattle who was responsible for her jilting. We know that there had never from the beginning been any real hope of a marriage. The weak young King was passionate, and his passion for once ran away with him—a little way. His weakness, however, prevailed, and was bound to prevail. In the end he ran whimpering to Bute. We know exactly, as it happens, what he said to him, for he set it down in writing.

'What I now lay before you,' his letter runs, 'I never intend to communicate to anyone.'

'The truth is, the D. of Richmond's sister arriv'd from Ireland towards the middle of Nov'r. I was struck with her first appearance at St. James's. My passion has been encreas'd every time

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I have since beheld her. Her voice is sweet, she seems sensible, has a thorough sense of her obligations to her sister [*sic*, her aunt] Lady Kildrare.

‘In short, she is everything I can form to myself lovely.

‘I am daily grown unhappy. Sleep has left me, which never was before interrupted by any reverse of fortune.

‘I protest before God I never have had any improper thought with regard to her. I don’t deny having often flatter’d myself with hopes that one day or other you would consent to my raising her to a Throne. Thus I mince nothing to you.

‘The other day I heard it suggested as if the D. of Marlborough made up to her. I shift’d my grief til retired to my chamber, where I remained for several hours in the depth of despair. I believe this was said without foundation, at least I will flatter myself so.

‘Having now laid the whole before you, I submit my happiness to you, who are the best of friends, whose friendship I value, if possible, above my love for the most charming of her sex.

‘If you can give me no hopes how to be happy, I surrender my fortune into your hands, and will keep my thoughts even from the dear object of my love, grieve in silence, and never trouble you more with this unhappy tale. For if I must either lose my friend or my love, I will give up the latter, for I esteem your friendship above every earthly joy.

‘If, on the contrary, you can devise any method for my keeping my love without forfeiting your friendship, I shall be more bound to you than ever, and shall thank Heaven for the thought of writing to you on this subject.

‘On the whole let me preserve your friendship, and tho’ my heart should break, I shall have the happy reflexion in dying that I have not been altogether unworthy of the best of friends, tho’ unfortunate in other things.

‘Pray let me have a line tonight.’

If this letter reveals how deeply in love the King was with Lady Sarah it shows as clearly that the hold Bute had over him was impossible for him to break. He had reconciled himself to defeat even before he sat down to beg his favour of his taskmaster. Lady Sarah’s son, Sir Henry Napier, believed that if his mother ‘had used her influence in any way to counteract the



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machinations of her secret opposers about the King . . . she might by her power over the King's affections have baffled all the intriguers against her, and ascended to the British throne'. I fear he was wrong. Lady Sarah's real foe was not even Lord Bute. It was her lover's infantilism.

Luckily for us, again, the Bute papers contain a draft of Bute's reply, so we may read that too.

Bute had no intention, if he could help it, of allowing the King he commanded so utterly, and the kingdom he already coveted for himself, to be ruled by his enemy Fox through his wife's pretty sister. He replied immediately, though he implied there was hardly any need for an answer: 'nor but God knows, my dear Sir, I with the utmost grief tell it you, the case admits not of the slightest doubt'. He'll think it all over himself, he promises, but instructs the King to 'think, Sir, in the mean time, who you are, what is your birth right, what you wish to be, and prepare your mind with a resolution to hear the voice of truth, for such alone shall come from me. However painful the office, duty and friendship and a thousand other ties, commands me, and I will obey tho' death looked me in the face.'

There was of course no question of death for anyone or anything except the lovers' hopes and the Fox ambitions, but Bute loved to be theatrical.

In George's abject reply, in which he sets down his resolution never to marry an Englishwoman, he actually proffers thanks to his friend. 'I have now more obligations to him than ever before,' he avers, for 'he has thoroughly convinced me of the impropriety of marrying a countrywoman.' Striving, as he so often appears to do, to parrot the sentiments he was commanded to feel, George determines to submit his inclinations to the good of his country, saying, 'I am born for the happiness or misery of a great nation, and consequently must often act contrary to my passions.' Then, in mid-sentence, he suddenly opts for getting married to somebody, anyway, 'as it must sooner or later come to pass. I should wish we could next summer by some method or other get some account of the various princesses in Germany. That binds me to nothing, and would save a great deal of trouble . . .'

Was there ever such a good boy? And did ever any man rush so eagerly, for such sanctimonious reasons, from the arms of one

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charmer to those of another, any other, and one quite unknown to him?

This letter from a youth of twenty-one, supposedly in the throes of ardent love, who has just had his beloved neatly snatched from him, ends with the doting hope that 'the dose you are to take tonight will have its desired effect'.

Prince George was a surprising young man, and after that we should not be too astonished at the next glimpse we have of him happily engaged with his mother in making a short list of prospective candidates for his love, if that is what we are to call it.

'Our evening has been spent', he writes to Bute, 'in looking at the New Berlin Almanack for princesses where three new ones have been found, as yet unthout [*sic*, unthought] of.'

It is all rather sad.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Her Parents*

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One should perhaps just refer here to the obstinate if unconvincing legend that George as a boy of fifteen had an affair with, and perhaps married, a pretty Quakeress older than himself, and that she bore him children.

This tale seems so much a product of the candlelight school, with its intriguing go-between, its abduction from the church door in a coach-and-four, and its picture of the desolate husband, Isaac Axford, searching for his abducted bride in the vicinity of the royal residences, that one is naturally inclined to dismiss it. However, there are some telling facts in its favour—such as that there did exist one Hannah Lightfoot, a Quakeress, born eight years before the prince, that she appears in the register of the notorious King's Chapel, Mayfair, as having been married to another Quaker, Isaac Axford, on December 11th, 1753, that she was expelled three years later by the Society of Friends by a 'Testimony of Denial' for having been married by a priest to some person unknown and unnamed not of their faith and against their rules; and that she then disappeared—which, all taken together, mean that one should pay it the tribute of not ignoring it completely.

The suggestion is, of course, that George's mother and Lord Bute arranged the Axford marriage in order to prevent one taking place between the girl and the infatuated prince, and that he took her away afterwards as his mistress, or as his wife, or, even, perhaps, as his bigamous wife. Her children, if such there were by a legal marriage, would have been rightful heirs to the throne.

For my part, I find the picture of the backward and painfully shy mother's boy, struggling with his lessons for twelve hours a day, whose most riotous relaxation was a game of pushpin with his brothers and sisters, sweeping a fair Quakeress off in a

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coach-and-four and setting her up in a permanent establishment for his delight, a little unlikely. Even with the help of that indefatigable plotter, the resourceful bigamist, Elizabeth Chudleigh, Duchess of Kingston (she who had dared to say '*Chacune à son Bute*' to Augusta when reprimanded for her own amorous peccadilloes), I should have thought that what the army calls the 'admin.' would have been beyond him.

Besides, George, many years later, referred to a similar escapade of his eldest son's as a 'shameful scrape', and said categorically that nothing of that nature had ever occurred in his own past.

\* \* \*

George, then, went with almost indecent haste from dreams of life with the lovely Lady Sarah to contemplating marriage with some hypothetical German princess.

King George II died on October 25th, 1760. Within a fortnight the Hanoverian minister in London, Münchhausen, had instructions to obtain from his brother (who happened to be the head of the Government in Hanover) secret personal reports on the various candidates for the hand of the brand-new, twenty-two-year-old King.

It was all conducted with the greatest secrecy. While George was making sheep's eyes at Lady Sarah, and throwing Fox into paroxysms of hope and fear, he was actively engaged in computing the assets and disadvantages of the princesses on his list. Now he discarded one for being 'stubborn and ill-temper'd to the greatest degree', now another for being deformed, now another for her 'strange father and grandfather', and now one for being a big girl. He seemed particularly frightened of any taint of madness in the blood, but the suggestion that a princess might be intelligent was almost as upsetting.

Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, youngest daughter of the Duke, was regarded at first, even by George, as hardly worth considering. For one thing, her father's crude and petty court at Strelitz was not at all the sort of background likely to produce a Queen of England. For another, Charlotte was plain to a point where it was no use pretending otherwise. She was, in fact, ugly. Perhaps remembering the reactions of Henry VIII to his 'Flanders mare', Anne of Cleves, the writers of the confidential

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reports were lukewarm. One felt bound to make it clear '*qu'elle n'est pas tout à fait une beauté des plus accomplies*', another that '*ce n'est pas justement une beauté*', and a third that she was '*sans de beaux traits*'. Indeed, the only convincing praise ever conceded to Charlotte's physical attributes was the engaging piece of information that she had '*des épaules impertinentes*'.

Owing partly to the poor attractions of the available Protestant princesses and partly to the burning impatience to be married to someone, anyone, anyhow, as long as it was soon, which seems to have overtaken George, she was the astonishing, final choice.

'I own', said George frankly to his Dearest Friend, 'tis not in every particular as I could wish.'

Yet he was 'resolv'd to fix there', and seemed pleased enough with a 'lock of the princess's hair, which seemed at candle of a very fine dark colour, and very soft'.

Once having chosen his bride he could not get her to England fast enough. He urged 'dispatch' in every letter. He would not even allow her to be delayed by her mother's sudden death—caused, Fox said cattily, by surprise at the match. Lord Harcourt was sent off with the formal proposal to Strelitz ('if he can find it', sneered Walpole) and orders to bring back the bride. It was a bride, in actual fact, that he brought with him, for before George and Charlotte ever set eyes on each other they were married.

The great secret had been kept even from Charlotte herself. She had known nothing of the arrangements for her disposal until she had found herself in the midst of a marriage ceremony. The English ambassador had stood proxy for a bridegroom on whom the bride had not even had time to let her thoughts dwell. Charlotte had been abruptly laid on a sofa, and her proxy husband had set his foot on it—a modest survival of the original ceremonial, in which the bride used to be fully bedded, and the bridegroom's representative would go through the ritual of inserting his leg, naked to the knee, under the bedclothes.

The ugly little princess from the kingdom where the castle had reminded the crown prince of Prussia of the gardener's house at home, where the capital seemed 'no more than a village with a single street in it', where 'the gentlemen got considerably drunk' at dinner, and the ladies darned stockings in public, was the Queen of England.

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'Think', Horace Walpole wrote to Sir Horace Mann, 'of the crown of England and a handsome young king dropping from the clouds into Strelitz! . . . She need be seventeen to bear it!'

The only member of the Privy Council who did not receive a summons to the special council meeting held on July 8th, 1761, in order to dispatch 'the most urgent and important business' was Henry Fox. The business was to announce the King's intended marriage to 'Miss Charlotte of Mecklenburgh', as Fox called her.

'This must have been settled with his consent long before Thursday, June 18th [when the King had made decided overtures to Lady Sarah Lennox]. What could he mean by it? Is it to be accounted for, and made consistent with honesty, good nature, or common sense?'

From Holland House Lady Sarah on the same day wrote a hurt and angry letter to her friend:

'Even last Thursday, the day after the orders were come out, the hypocrite had the face to come up and speak to me with all the good humour in the world, and seemed to want to speak to me but was afraid.

'There is something so astonishing in this that I can hardly believe . . .

'I cannot help wishing tomorrow over . . . He must have sent to this woman before you went out of town. Then what business had he to begin again?

'In short, his behaviour is that of a man who has neither *sense, good nature, nor honesty*.

'I shall go Thursday sennight. I shall take care to shew that I am not mortified to anybody, but if it is true that one can vex anybody with a reserved, cold manner, he shall have it, I promise him . . .

'I did not cry, I assure you, which I believe you will, as I know you were more set upon it than I was.

'The thing I am most angry at is looking so like a fool, as I shall . . . but I don't much care. If he was to change his mind again (which can't be, tho') and not give me a very good reason for his conduct, I would not have him, for if he is so weak as to be govern'd by everybody I shall have but a bad time of it . . .

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he will hate us all anyway, for one generally hates people that one is in the wrong with, and that knows one has acted wrong . . .

King George and Queen Charlotte were re-married the day the bride landed in England, and within a few hours of their first meeting, in St. James's Chapel.

The little, lean, yellow-faced seventeen-year-old with the wide mouth and the flaring nostrils, the plebeian-looking little Queen with the low forehead and the disappearing chin, was full of chatter and of self-confidence for which she had little reason.

According to Walpole, watching jealously, her long violet-coloured velvet mantle pinned with a brooch of pearls 'dragged itself and almost all the rest of her attire almost down to her waist', as she moved slowly on the arm of the dread 'Butcher' of Culloden to be given away. She moved slowly, for Cumberland, swollen, decrepit at forty, blind in one eye, and shaken by a recent stroke of palsy, was encumbered by twenty stones of weight and a bad leg which had to be dragged painfully along. He was no pretty escort for a bride. Most of those watching their progress firmly believed that the waiting bridegroom was wishing that Henry Fox and Lady Susan Lennox were in their places.

Lady Sarah herself was not far away. Because of her rank she had been invited to be one of the ten unmarried daughters of dukes and earls who were to be trainbearers to the bride. Her family, and especially her sister, had done their best to persuade her to refuse, but Lady Sarah had been child enough to insist on accepting.

'Well, Sal, you are the first virgin in England,' Fox had said to her, half-angry, half-joking (and pronouncing it *vargin*), 'and you shall take your place in spite of them all as chief bridesmaid, and the King shall behold your pretty face and repent.'

So Lady Sarah stood, 'by far the chief angel' of them all in the watching Walpole's eyes, dressed in shimmering white and silver, with a coronet of diamonds on her head. The ninety thousand pounds worth of jewellery which weighed down the little foreign bride could not compensate for what nature had bestowed on Lady Sarah, and perhaps it was well for her that the

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wedding was solemnized at night and by candlelight. Sir Joshua Reynolds' picture of the ceremony, which hangs at Kew, shows an almost featureless bride and groom, and even more indistinct bridesmaids. Perhaps the truthful artist for once wished to be tactful.

A fortnight after the marriage George's other former love, Lady Pembroke, also shone in the natural splendour of beauty on a great occasion. This time it was at the Coronation. Alone, at the head of the countesses, she made a picture of majestic modesty, undoubtedly fit to be a queen.

Only a matter of months after the wedding Lady Sarah was married to Charles Bunbury, heir to a baronetcy, who loved horseflesh, and lives in history as the fortunate possessor, not of her famous beauty, but of Diomed, the first Derby winner. Henry Fox had told his ward that she would do well not to refuse any good offer, and Charles Bunbury was not a bad one.

It is all less trivial and less irrelevant than one might think; as we shall see.

\* \* \*

The life which the tall, good-looking and youthful monarch of a rich country and a gay nobility offered his seventeen-year-old Queen turned out to be simpler and even more confined than that of her father's court at Strelitz. Immediately after her wedding she found herself the prisoner of a decidedly strange young man. She was confined behind invisible walls in London, and at Windsor and Kew. George's hatred of his grandfather made him shun St. James's Palace and the royal summer retreats of Kensington Palace and Hampton Court, the scene of that never-forgotten blow. Soon after his marriage he bought from Sir Charles Sheffield, for £21,000, the little red-brick Buckingham House, on the site of which his eldest son was later to build the present Buckingham Palace, and gave it to his wife. Later it was settled on her by Act of Parliament, in place of the traditional Queen's dowry-house, Somerset House, in the Strand. Though it was known as the Queen's House it was in reality the family's London residence.

The King used St. James's ('this dust trap', as he called it) as little as possible, and only for the most formal functions. When not in London he lived at Windsor, or visited his mother at



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Kew, his childhood home. When she died, some ten years after his marriage, he moved there at once.

The Duke of Gloucester, one of the five brothers who had shared his restricted childhood, and who was close to George, once told Mrs. Harcourt (sister-in-law of the Earl who had brought Charlotte to England, and who became her Lord Chamberlain and Master of the Horse and a dear friend of all the family), that he thought his mother had been unfairly blamed for 'the retired life the King and Queen led for the first many years of their marriage', and that it was 'entirely the King's doing'. His mother had isolated him, it is true, beforehand—'he had been kept locked up till he married and taught to have a bad opinion of the world'—but that he was 'delighted with having entirely under his own training a young innocent girl of seventeen, for such was the Queen when she arrived, and that he determined that she should be wholly devoted to him alone, and should have no other friend or society'. The Duke of Gloucester 'knew the King on her arrival told her this, and told her that even with the Princess of Wales she was to have as little communication as possible, and depend on him and him alone'.

The poor girl lived like a prisoner, not even allowed to play cards, of which she had been very fond, with anyone but her increasingly gloomy and obsessional young husband.

To quote from Mrs. Harcourt's diary, 'except for the ladies of the bedchamber for half an hour a week in a funeral circle, or a ceremonious drawing-room, she never had a soul to speak to but the King'. There was even talk that a spy, a friend of Bute's, had been set to watch her.

After the birth of her first child, the visit of a nurse, or the governess, Lady Charlotte Finch, a connection of Lord Bute's, was 'a little treat'. For many years, Mrs. Harcourt tells us, they had no other society. 'Expecting to be Queen of a gay court, finding herself confined as in a convent, and hardly allowed to think without the leave of her husband, checked her spirits, and made her fearful and cautious to extreme, and when the time came that amusements were allowed her her mind was formed to a different manner of life.'

By then Charlotte had changed from the bouncy, if humourless, girl who on her bridal voyage to England had insisted on cheering up the seasick ladies of her entourage by praying,

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singing Luther's hymns, and playing *God Save the King* to her guitar. She who had tossed her head at the suggestion that her bridegroom might not approve of her clothes, with a bold, 'Let him dress himself, I shall dress as I please!' was mastered. She who had mocked at a warning that she would have to submit to early hours, with the buoyant rejoinder '*qu'elle ne voulait pas se coucher avec les poules*', soon meekly led a life in all respects as unexciting as a hen's. She herself once described it, using a quotation:

*'They eat, they drank, they  
slept. What then?  
They slept, they eat, they  
drank again.'*

Her total subjugation to her husband was apparent to all, for, though she played the queen to others, to him she behaved like a very obsequious subject.

There were those who found this Queen a warm and charming woman, 'with much sweetness in her manner', of great intelligence, wit and liveliness, and particularly imaginative and sensitive about the feelings of others. Yet others constantly wrote of her as harsh, cold, strict, punctilious to the point of cruelty, even to her own children (whom she kept standing behind her chair until they fell asleep on their feet), bad-tempered, dull and even stupid. Apart from a handful of close friends she was generally disliked, and that from the outset. All brides are lovely, and all queens brilliant and beautiful—all except Charlotte, that is. The cartoonists were vicious, the wits made poisonous little jokes at her expense, and the nation laughed and laughed. No one spared her. Time served only to improve her, they jeered, and when Walpole one day repeated this to her Lord Chamberlain, even he, her friend, replied, 'Yes, I do think the *bloom* of her ugliness is going off!' Even when aged, she would be 'Old Plug Nose'.

Either the young Queen, wounded by such cruelty, adopted a defensive chilliness, or, over-ruled, insulted, isolated, a stranger, and condemned to almost a quarter of a century of continuous child-bearing, she really became morose and sour, hard and cruel and cold.

That she was not only repressed, but had to learn to repress

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her own ebullience, we know. She herself wrote of the patience she was forced to cultivate: 'As necessity has no law, I do not look upon this as a particular merit, for I am *philosophe malgré moi*.' After nearly forty years of marriage she would sigh, 'That little dear word silence has so often stood my friend in necessity that I make it my constant companion.'

Patience, silence and necessity: those were her watchwords. Early in her marriage she decided on her rôle, and it was one which would have enormous importance in the lives of her children, and especially her daughters. Had Charlotte dominated her husband, by whatever means, as Caroline of Anspach had done his grandfather, the princesses' histories might have been different. For her, what the King wished must be, and no daughter ever found an advocate for her cause in her mother against her father.

In a letter to Bute, written on the day Charlotte landed, all 'inquietude' for his first sight of her, George had hoped that God would 'make her fruitful'.

The Almighty obliged handsomely. To this couple were born, first, three boys very close together:

George (Prince of Wales, Regent, and then George IV)  
Frederick (Bishop of Osnaburg, Duke of York)  
William (Duke of Clarence, later William IV)

Then, a year after William, the first girl:

Charlotte (Princess Royal) later Queen of Würtemberg

Then, a year after her, another boy:

Edward (Duke of Kent, father of Queen Victoria)

After Edward came a pair of girls, with two years between them:

Augusta  
Elizabeth (later Landgravine of Hesse Homburg)

Then came another little group of three boys:

Ernest (Duke of Cumberland, later King of Hanover)  
Augustus (Duke of Sussex)  
Adolphus (Duke of Cambridge)

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Another couple of girls followed this trio, with only a year between them:

Mary (later Duchess of Gloucester)

Sophia (our Sophia)

Last came three children destined to die young:

Octavius

Alfred

Amelia

Between 1762 and 1783 George III and Queen Charlotte had brought into the world fifteen children.

\* \* \*

The King grew in eccentricity with the years. Virtue was his object, but it was so exaggerated as to become almost a vice. On the last day of the month which marked his accession he had issued a proclamation for the encouragement of piety and virtue, and for the prevention and punishment of 'vice, profaneness and immorality'. He insisted that his household should be run on lines so simple as to verge on the ludicrous. By the time that Princess Sophia was gaining her first impressions of the world the family had long settled into the cosy but cramped quarters of the little Dutch House, the present Kew Palace. There the King and Queen lived, to the scorn of the upper classes, an extraordinary life for royalty.

The King rose at five or six o'clock in the morning, dressed barefoot on a cold floor, lit his own fire, made tea for himself, and prayed for an hour. He was not above carrying a bucket of coal. Sometimes he rode or walked before breakfast, to which his children came from the little houses about Kew Green as the family grew ever larger. Then he became both schoolmaster and pupil, now teaching his sons, now taking lessons himself to make up for the years he had wasted as a boy.

He was a farmer by inclination, and, though not particularly successful at it, he took his farming seriously. He even contributed letters and articles to periodicals on such subjects as the rotation of crops or the best way to confine chickens. He was called 'Farmer George' by his people when they felt inclined to

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be polite, which was seldom, and his family gave him the bucolic-sounding nickname of Jodeley. His sons were made to sow and reap, to thresh and mill, and to eat the loaves made from their flour. Even the princesses had to bake 'dolls' bread' from the wheat which the princes had grown.

Like any other early-rising farmer's family, this one dined alone as often as not, went early to bed, and even left formal occasions prematurely. George permitted no dissipations, unless visits to the theatre could be called by that name. There his



*Farmer George and his wife as Gillray saw them*

tastes were crude. He might send for Garrick or Mrs. Siddons to read a play to the royal circle, but he liked farce best, and laughed most boisterously at broad, if innocent, comedy. His standards were not much above the custard-pie-in-the-face school, and his idea of a jolly evening's entertainment was a production of *The Beggar's Opera* with men taking the women's parts and women the men's. An incorrigible practical joker himself, he loved to see the dignity of others laid low, but was very jealous of his own.

Punctual, regular, methodical, George was too like his grandfather to be careless with money. The family meanness reached strange new proportions with him, and his exercises in niggardliness became notorious in the kingdom. One of his first actions as king had been to abolish 'vails', or tips, in the royal

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household. He kept himself and his family on short commons, living mostly off thin soup and vegetables, and neither he nor they drank much.

The Chevalier D'Eon, a French diplomat, wrote home in astonishment at this extraordinary king.

'He never has any kind of supplies, but sends for six bottles of wine at a time, and for one bottle of rum with which to brew punch, so that he is the laughing-stock of all the city dealers, who are great feeders, heavy drinkers, and whose jokes are as light as their roast beef. Numerous pamphlets and prints have been published on the subject, and the matter has been turned into a jest on the stage.'

There was certainly no need for such frugality. The king was going about in shabby clothes at the very time when he was spending vast sums of money in political bribery to attain his ends. It was a neurotic trait. He could not help it, and reason had little to do with it.

Hard on others, George was harder on himself. If his family ate little, he ate practically nothing. Partly in an effort to control his weight, he would go on horseback, straight from his morning tea and biscuit, in all weathers, from Windsor to London, to change at the Queen's House, and then drive, still fasting, to the long tiring levees at St. James's Palace. From those he might go on to a Privy Council meeting or an audience with his ministers. He would reach home late at night, having swallowed nothing but another cup of tea and a slice of bread and butter. His twenty-mile walks, his strenuous rides lasting several hours, exhausted his companions, while they kept him lean, hard and strong. For nearly a quarter of a century he never missed a council, levee or drawing-room because of sickness, though he had been born a sickly, premature baby.

The very backbone of this family's life was religion. The King himself had a somewhat narrow but real faith. At his Coronation he had insisted on removing 'the bauble', as he called his crown, before going to the altar to receive the sacrament. His private prayer-book, also, bore witness to his humility. In the prayer used during the session of Parliament he had scratched out the words 'our most religious and gracious king', and in his own writing substituted 'a most miserable sinner'.

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So Sophia and her five sisters grew up in the shadow of this vigorous, rigorous, pious man, submitting to the hard, uncomfortable life he considered right, with no amelioration from their mother. He was a good father in his way, bluff and affectionate when things went well, though harsh and unbending when they did not.

To all his children while they remained infants he gave a passionate love, and though he crossed swords with his sons as soon as they left babyhood behind, to his daughters he remained almost frighteningly possessive. He might forbid them to give or exchange presents, he might ban newspapers, he might refuse them pocket-money, but he loved them hugely, immensely, engulfingly, and he expected them to love him in return in the same way. That there was something unusual in his relationship with them even Sir Herbert Taylor, the almost too perfectly discreet a royal secretary, admitted uneasily in his memoirs.

Princess Sophia was undoubtedly warmly welcomed, as all fifteen children were.

Of her earliest years we know a few facts.

She was born on November 3rd, 1777, at the Queen's House.

She was christened Sophia after her mother Charlotte Sophia; after her great-great-grandmother, the Electress Sophia of Hanover, founder of the line; and after the unhappy Sophia Dorothea of Zelle, whom George I had so cruelly imprisoned for betraying him.

Hardly was she born before her wet-nurse, upset by her own mother's illness, abandoned her and she was weaned as abruptly as a kitten given away before its time. Perhaps Sophia's lifelong delicacy can be laid at Mrs. Williams's door.

Once, as a child, she asked at breakfast what a prison was, and gave her pocket-money to buy bread for the poor prisoners.

Once she commiserated with a lady who had lost her baby, 'Dear me! How sorry I am for poor Mrs. Blank! I'm sure I hope she'll soon have another!'

Once she ran up to Lady Cremorne and whispered that her music master, Mr. Webb, who had a very large nose and was so sensitive about it that he used to hide it behind a nosegay or even a branch, would be coming in. 'Lady Cremorne, Mr. Webb has got a very great nose, but that is only to be pitied—so mind you don't laugh!'

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But all this tells us little, no more perhaps than that Sophia was probably rather a sweet little girl.

It is not with the formal superficialities of Sophia's birth, christening and infancy, nor with the little loving tales of a normal childhood, that we are here concerned.

Far more important to us than any such details is an event which had taken place long before she was born.

Five years before her birth her father, who had already so efficiently imprisoned their mother, had set about erecting a prison for her and her sisters. As effectively as any King in a fairy tale he had built a tower and shut up his six daughters in it.



PART II

*Suitors will be Prosecuted*



## CHAPTER 5

### *'No Cakes and Ale'*

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**H**is religion is free from all hypocrisy, but it is not of the most charitable sort. He has rather too much attention to the sins of his neighbours.'

So wrote Lord Waldegrave of his pupil, George III. It was a perceptive remark.

George may have sacrificed his yearnings after 'those divine creatures' who roused his boiling passions to what he considered his dignity and his duty. Two of his brothers were not so self-sacrificing. Both made marriages he considered grossly unsuitable. His views were probably well known to them, for both found it expedient to marry in secret.

The first offender, though the last to reveal his secret, was Augusta's third son, the Duke of Gloucester.

After York, the second son, George loved Gloucester most of his brothers. He said he was 'the only one in the world to whom I can fully unburden myself'. York, who died at twenty-seven, had turned out a libertine; but George had hopes of the brother who had, like himself, been dull, apathetic and despised by his mother. There is a story, hideous if true, that Augusta had once egged on the other children 'to laugh at the fool' until he had hung his head in silence. Then she had berated him for being sulky.

He was not sulky, he said, he was thinking.

'And pray what are you thinking of?' the princess asked scornfully.

'I was thinking what I should feel if I had a son as unhappy as you make me.'

Gloucester had grown to be a serious, shy and pious young man, unlike the gallivanting York and the reprobate Cumberland. But he was as susceptible to women as any of the brothers, and he was only nineteen when he fell in love with one of the

## ‘NO CAKES AND ALE’

beauties of the day. He pursued her doggedly for four years, and in the end she gave way.

On September 6th, 1766, he was secretly married to the Dowager Countess of Waldegrave.

This respectable-sounding personage was an illegitimate daughter of Sir Edward Walpole, Horace Walpole's brother.

Sir Edward had had four illegitimate daughters, all beautiful, by his mistress, Mrs. Clements, who was certainly a milliner, had probably sold rags, and had possibly earned her living in an older profession than either.

The four lovely girls were received everywhere, except, naturally, at Court. They married well, three of them very well. The eldest one married the brother of an earl, and the second an earl. The husband of the third, not to be outdone, succeeded in becoming an earl.

It would be pleasant to record that it was the fourth daughter who achieved a royal duke, but it was the second one, Maria, already a countess, to whom Gloucester was married.

Maria had always been ambitious. Even as a child she used to swear that ‘she would be a lady’. Her father would reply, wryly, that it was impossible, ‘for she was a beggar’. To that Maria always answered merely, ‘Then I will be a beggar-lady!’

Maria had married the Lord Waldegrave who, before his marriage, had, reluctantly enough, allowed himself to be appointed governor to George and his brothers. A gay, clever and delightful man, he was responsible for the quotation which opens this chapter.

Maria Waldegrave was a woman of fine character. She was also rich. She had many admirers, any one of whom outshone the witless duke, whom Lady Sarah Lennox called, with an apt, if unintentional, misspelling of the latest vogue-word, ‘a boar’. Among them was another, if not a royal, duke, the Duke of Portland.

She was thirty-one, and he twenty-three, when she at last agreed to accept Gloucester. It was a private wedding, in the drawing-room of her house in Pall Mall. They were married by her personal chaplain. There were no witnesses.

The secret, though with some loss of face for the bride, was pretty well kept. Whispers went about that a ceremony had taken place, but they remained whispers.

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The Gloucesters did not live together. He visited her daily, and her liveries and establishment were full of royal touches, so that (although he always treated her with profound respect) she appeared more a mistress than a wife. She had lost more than she gained by her dubious and secret elevation in rank.

For six years things continued in this rather unsatisfactory state, and might have gone on thus indefinitely but for one or two developments.

In May 1772 the Duke came home from abroad to find that his elder brother, Cumberland, had come out into the open concerning his own clandestine marriage, which had taken place the year before, and was in severe disgrace with the King.

Furthermore, his mother was dead, and the Royal Marriages Act had just been passed.

Gloucester had not been entirely without warning that something of the sort might happen. Before their mother's funeral the King had written to tell him that on her death-bed she had 'asked me whether I did not mean to apply to Parliament for a prevention to clandestine marriages in my family, to which I replied that in a few days I should send a message for that purpose to both Houses'.

Augusta had died on February 8th, and within a month of her death her son had carried out her last wish.

The Royal Marriages Act—which we will be having a closer look at presently—need not of itself have obliged Gloucester to reveal his marriage. The Act could not affect its validity, for the ceremony had taken place long before it was passed.

However, a psychological factor which had not operated before may have come into play at that time. With his brother Cumberland's secret marriage once publicly announced, the opinion of those who maintained that the Gloucester liaison was purely scandalous might have received apparent confirmation if he had remained silent. Besides, his wife Maria herself might well have been hurt at the contrast between her position and that of Cumberland's acknowledged wife.

Be all that as it may, there was a third, and far more pressing, reason why Gloucester should at last come into the open about his marriage. After nearly six years his wife was pregnant. Concealment was no longer either possible or sensible, and a

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formal announcement would have to be made to the King if a shred of her once spotless reputation was to be preserved and the child of the marriage take its proper place in the succession to the Crown.

Before her child was born Maria wrote to her father a remarkable letter, breaking silence at last:

‘My dear and ever honoured Sir,

‘. . . When the Duke of Gloucester married me (which was in September 1766) I promised him upon no consideration in the world to own it, *even to you*, without his permission, which permission I never had till yesterday, when he arrived here in much better health and looks—better than I ever saw him—yet, as you may suppose, much hurt by all that passed in his absence; so much so that I have had great difficulty to prevail on him to let things as much as possible remain as they are.

‘To secure my character, without injuring his, is the utmost of my wishes, and I dare say that you and all my relations will agree with me that I shall be much happier to be called Lady Waldegrave and respected as the Duchess of Gloucester than to feel myself the cause of leading such a life as his brother the Duke of Cumberland does, in order for me to be called Your Royal Highness.

‘I am prepared for the sort of abuse the newspapers will be full of. Very few will believe that a woman will refuse to be called princess if it is in her power.

‘*To have the power is my pride*, and not using it in some measure pays the debt I owe the Duke for the honour he has done me . . .

‘If ever I am unfortunate enough to be called Duchess of Gloucester there is an end of *almost* all the comforts which I now enjoy, which, if things go on as they are, are many.’

The King was furious and bitterly hurt by the announcement of what he called this ‘highly disgraceful step’.

‘I cannot deny’, he wrote to Lord North, ‘that on the subject of this Duke my heart is wounded; I have ever loved him with the fondness one bears to a child.’

He lay sleepless for several nights, unable to rest from rage. He even appointed a Commission, consisting of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor and the Bishop of London,

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to see if the marriage could be proved illegal as there were no witnesses. It was to no avail. Incidentally, Gloucester, gallantly if obtusely, in view of the new Act, declared he would, if necessary, re-marry his wife, next time with witnesses. It is ironical to note in passing that the most beautiful of the King's own flock of daughters was to marry the son of this union; though not, needless to say, with the King's permission.

So much for the Gloucester marriage, of which the King learned only after the passing of the Marriages Act. It was his brother Cumberland's secret marriage, not Gloucester's, which was directly responsible for that Act.

If Gloucester was inept and unattractive, Cumberland was undesirable in a far more serious way. Younger than Gloucester, he was old in sinfulness. A chattering ninny, as proud of his rank as if he had no right to it, he had inherited his father's liking for vulgar company and low pursuits. Like York, he had broken out of his confinement at the first opportunity, and, as Jesse the historian has it, ‘rushed at once from the schoolroom to the stews and the night cellars’.

At the age of twenty-five Cumberland had infuriated the King by being summoned to appear in court to defend himself in an action for adultery—he was the first, but not the last, prince of the blood to do so. He had had a nasty little affair with the wife of an almost equally unpleasant earl, Lord Grosvenor, conducted in disguise from a small pub near the husband's seat. The Earl sued the Duke for damages, and got then, ten thousand pounds' worth.

There was a great deal of publicity given to the case, and newspaper readers thoroughly enjoyed themselves over the squalid details which came out. They found it excruciatingly funny that a royal duke sat down to write to his mistress in exceedingly bad grammar that he wished to kiss ‘her dearest little hair’, and that he was mawkish enough to tell her that ‘I have your heart, and it lies warm in my breast. I hope mine feels as easy to you.’

The King, that model of virtue, was horribly embarrassed. His concern turned to rage when he found some of the mud bespattering himself.

On September 7th, 1771, the following paragraph was published in the *Public Advertiser*.

## ‘NO CAKES AND ALE’

‘The defence of H.R.H. Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland . . . is quite a catchpenny, the writer being Col. Luttrell . . . We are told that his defence will speedily be followed by a new publication, entitled *The Letters of an Elder Brother to a Fair Quaker*, which will entirely retrieve the literary fame of an illustrious family, which has been lately endangered by a hasty and incorrect writer belonging to it.’

This was obviously a teasing allusion to the King’s supposed affair (and possible marriage) with Hannah Lightfoot.

The King even had to find the money for Cumberland. On Guy Fawkes Day we find him appealing to his amiable Prime Minister, Lord North, to let him have the funds with which to settle the affair quickly. He realized, he said, that there would be great difficulty in finding so large a sum as thirteen thousand pounds in so short a time. However, the money must be got for ‘the damages and costs, which, if not paid this day se’nnight, the proctors will certainly force the House, which at this licentious time will occasion reflexions on the rest of the family. Whatever can be done ought to be done.’

North assured him that the money would be produced.

‘This takes a heavy load off of me,’ George replied, ‘though I cannot enough express how much I feel at being the least concerned in an affair that my way of thinking has ever taught to behold as highly improper, but I flatter myself the truths I have thought it incumbent to utter may be of some use in his future conduct.’

Alas! Cumberland’s future (and, indeed, immediate) conduct showed what he thought of the King’s curtain lectures. Before the public had stopped laughing at his love-letters he had discarded the Grosvenor countess and started another affair with the wife of a rich timber merchant. Luckily for the King, the timber merchant seemed pleased rather than the reverse, or else George might have been presented with the bill for another expensive lawsuit.

Then, while the gossips breathlessly tried to catch up with this latest affair, a staggering announcement appeared in the public journals. It told them that His Majesty’s brother, the Duke of Cumberland, had given his hand at the altar to Anne, widow of Christopher Horton, Esquire, of Catton, in Derbyshire, and daughter of Simon, Lord Irnham, afterward Earl of Carhampton.



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Unlike Maria Waldegrave's, this marriage had been open, and properly conducted. It had taken place on the night of the 2nd of October, 1771, at Mrs. Horton's house in Hertford Street, Mayfair, and there had been witnesses.

Anne Horton was better bred than Maria Waldegrave, in so far as she was the legitimate daughter of a peer, albeit only a poor Irish one. Of true breeding she had none. She was loose, and she was fast, and she was coarse. Those who knew her said that it was necessary to wash out one's ears after a few minutes' conversation with her.

She was pretty, however.

'The new princess of the blood', wrote Walpole to Sir Horace Mann a month after her marriage, 'is a young widow of twenty-four, extremely pretty, not handsome, very well made, with the most amorous eyes in the world, and eyelashes a yard long; coquette beyond measure, artful as Cleopatra, and completely mistress of all her passions and projects. Indeed, eyelashes three quarters of a yard shorter would have served to conquer such a head as she has turned.'

At any time this marriage would have seemed a disaster to the King. As it happened, the news could not have been broken to him at a worse time, or in a more offensive way.

It came when he was distraught with grief and worry.

His sister, Caroline Matilda, married to the dissolute imbecile, King Christian of Denmark, had turned from him to his protégé, Count Struensee, first as a physician who might cure her of the results of her husband's bebaucheries, and then as a lover. Eventually Struensee, by then the first man in the state, was beheaded, and the Queen exiled with her six-months-old infant to a castle prison. Only her brother's prompt and decisive help saved her life, and an English warship sent by him bore her away, still alive at least, to be confined in the Castle at Zelle, not far from the one where the wife of George I had languished for thirty-two years after another such indiscretion. Caroline Matilda was not to live as long. Her brother would secretly aid plans for a revolution, her release, and her restoration in Denmark, but she would die before it could all be brought to pass, and be laid in the same vault as her sinning, unforgiven ancestress.

George was fond of this younger sister, and had long tried to help her with advice on how to be happy though married

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to a fool, a sadist, and a lecher. The announcement of Cumberland’s marriage came just as the terrible scandal of her disgrace broke.

Besides, his mother was dying. At the very time she was believed to be at the point of death from cancer of the throat. Knowing that her body was being destroyed by the horrible disease and her heart wrenched by her daughter’s troubles, George had to see her wantonly given further pain by the insult to her pride of her son’s foolish marriage.

To George it came in the deliberately offensive form of a careless note dispatched to him by his brother from a honeymoon hotel in Calais.

King George could do nothing about his mother’s cancer, and little enough about his sister’s broken life—at the time of Cumberland’s marriage he was poring over the documents concerning her guilt, and trying to work out with his appalling brother-in-law a *modus vivendi* for him and his disgraced Queen. He could, he believed, do something about his brother’s having ‘stooped to marry Anne Horton’.

He informed the Duke that he refused ever to see him again unless Mrs. Horton continued to be known by that name and no other.

Next, he publicly showed his displeasure. Foreign ambassadors were given to understand that they need not call at Cumberland House, and the Lord Chamberlain gave notice to the fashionable world that those who visited the Duke and his new Duchess would no longer be received at Court.

King or no king, George could not prevent people calling on the Cumberlands, and they did so in great numbers. The threat of banishing them from Court fell flat. He would have been left with very thin ranks in attendance had he carried it out; and he had to haul down his flag.

The fact was, the marriage was perfectly legal, whether the King liked it or not, and any children born of it would be in the line of succession. Not only was the King powerless to alter that, but everyone, including the Cumberlands, knew it.

Far from being abashed, the Cumberlands set up a sort of rival court. Another long and unhappy family feud had begun. The Duke became an ardent Whig. Cumberland House became the social centre where the Opposition met to plot, and to which,

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all too soon, the King's sons, to his fury and humiliation, would gravitate.

The King never forgave Cumberland. He never received his Duchess. He could not, it seemed, harm him, or undo his marriage. But he and his dying mother took thought as to what steps he might take to ease the pressure of their thwarted anger and prevent the repetition—ever—of such intolerable insolence as any of their family daring to marry where they wished.

As Augusta considered her sons and daughters, and George his brothers and sisters, they may well have thought themselves better qualified to rule their romantic lives than they themselves had proved.

Was not, for example, George's elder sister, Augusta, the Duchess of Brunswick, who had watched Lady Sarah so jealously, miserable with her duke?

Did not Caroline Matilda even then stand helpless in the wreckage of her life?

Had not the Duke of York, early a libertine, died at twenty-seven in mid-pursuit of his latest love, leaving behind another lady who saw fit to mourn him ostentatiously and to refer to him as her 'betrothed'?

Had not Cumberland already disgraced himself, and all too often?

And were there not even then rumours that Gloucester intended to marry the woman—not even born in wedlock, let alone of suitable rank or nationality—who had been so close to him for six years?

They needed to look no further in that generation. In the next, the Prince of Wales would be a man in a few years, and he had brothers. If they were to follow in the footsteps of their uncles, then the King could envisage a troubled future.

No, he who had shown himself capable of self-restraint and self-sacrifice for the duties, dignities and responsibilities of kingship, must put himself in a position to command those weaker than he.

*'Dost thou think, because thou art  
virtuous, there shall be  
no more cakes and ale?'*

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George did. More, he would see to it that if he had anything to do with it, cakes and ale would be put out of his family's reach, and for ever.

He gave his promise to his dying mother; and in February 1772 sent his message to the Houses of Parliament, introducing the Royal Marriages Bill.

## CHAPTER 6

### *Rex vs. the English*

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**T**he populace hated Augusta dead as much as alive. Her son, who had vowed never to forgive the insults paid to her while she lived, heard their huzzas of joy ringing in his ears as he sent off his message to the House of Lords only twelve days after her death. She had not yet been buried.

‘GEORGE R.,

His Majesty being desirous from paternal affection to his own family, and anxious concern for the future welfare of his people, and the honour and dignity of his Crown, that the right of approving all marriages in the royal family (which ever has belonged to the kings of this realm, as a matter of public concern), may be made effectual, recommends to both Houses of Parliament, to take into their serious consideration, whether it may not be wise and expedient to supply the defect of the laws now in being, and, by some new provision, more effectually to guard the descendants of His late Majesty, King George the Second, (other than the issue of princesses who have married, or may hereafter marry, into foreign families), from marrying without the approbation of His Majesty, his heirs or successors, first had and obtained.

G.R.’

The Prime Minister, Lord North, whom he had known since his boyhood, was in appearance an uglier edition of the King.

‘Two large prominent eyes that rolled about to no purpose—for he was utterly short-sighted—a wide mouth, thick lips, and inflated visage, gave him the air of a blind trumpeter.’ There is no need to give the source of this wickedly evocative quotation, and North’s portraits bear out Walpole’s description.

North shared the Guelphs’ tendency to fat, too, and their fair complexion, regular features, light hair, bushy eyebrows, and

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prominent grey eyes. Like them, he was no orator—his tongue was supposed to be too large for his mouth. Poor Fred, who had been a close friend of his parents, the Earl and Countess of Guilford—North was christened Frederick after him—had once jokingly remarked to the Earl, *à propos* of the strong likeness between their first-born sons, that it looked as if one of their wives must have played her husband false.

Whether or no he was his half-brother, North was a Prime Minister after George's own heart. He gave little or no trouble. Very lazy, but useful in the House of Commons for his quick wit and unruffled demeanour, as moral as the King himself, apparently upright but willing to do anything to please his master, he was just the sort of pliable, subservient and devoted minister to suit a king who was often stubborn and unreasonable. Another man might have advised King George not to put forward the bill, might even have struggled against it. Not so Lord North. What the King wished he must have.

The King wanted it badly, and he took a keen personal interest in it. He followed its fortunes closely, demanding bulletins as to its progress; and in the small hours of the morning, after late sittings, North had to send his reports by messenger across St. James's Park. George scribbled notes, sometimes several a day, to North, urging, encouraging, reproaching, and even lambasting him, as well as reviling those who dared to oppose the King's will. He went so far as to suggest the adoption of tactics which he considered would ensure its success.

The King's attitude to his bill, and, incidentally, to his Parliament, are made clear in one of these many missives.

'I expect every nerve to be strained to carry the bill. It is not a question relating to the Administration, but personally to myself. Therefore I have a right to expect a hearty support from everyone in my service.'

This curious document ends with the significant and ominous words, 'And I shall remember defaulters.'

Like North, King George III was very much against bribery and corruption, patronage, blackmail and bullying tactics—until they happened to suit his ends. He was very sorry when he had to do what he really believed to be wrong; but he did it, and, as he always knew God to be on his side, he did it boldly. He heard with anxiety of the strong feeling in the Commons against the

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bill, and asked North for a list of 'those that went away and those that deserted to the minority', which 'would be a rule for my conduct in the drawing-room tomorrow'.

He could take sterner measures than chilliness in the drawing-rooms towards those who voted according to their conscience against it, as another letter to North shows.

'Lord North's attention', he writes, 'in correcting the impression that I had that Col. Burgoyne and Lt. Col. Harcourt were absent yesterday [from the voting lobbies, where he expected them to give their support to his bill] is very handsome to these gentlemen, for I certainly should have thought myself obliged to have named a new Governor [of Fort William, in Scotland] in room of the former, [and] to have removed the other from my Bedchamber.'

The stick and the carrot secured the backing, embarrassed and even skulking though it was, of the Government and its supporters. There was one noteworthy exception.

This was, interestingly enough, the twenty-three-year-old nephew and much-loved friend of the beautiful girl whom Bute and the newly dead Augusta had, ten years before, foiled of her hopes of becoming Queen of England: Lady Sarah Lennox.

Charles James Fox, a Junior Lord of the Admiralty, was a rising star on the Government benches. This odd, gentle, obese young man, though as unstable and as corrupt as his father before him, and already a dissolute liver, a hard drinker and an inveterate gambler, was at the beginning of a great career. The introduction of such a bill by the King who had jilted Lady Sarah would put him in an unenviable position, even if his constitutional principles did not forbid him to vote for it. 'Big with mischief', he was to call it in a vigorous speech in the Commons.

He chose to resign from the Ministry before the bill was even presented in the Lords. His resignation had an immediate effect. The Government, alarmed, hastily amended the bill before introducing it. The whole of Section 2, the single loophole through which imprisoned royal lovers might escape from some ogreish sovereign, was inserted.

The King was deeply offended by Fox's action. He never forgot it, and never forgave him for it.

However, the bill was pressed through, with the King, at the Queen's House, impatiently cracking the whip. Despite many

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protests at the 'wonderful dispatch' (North even refusing to have it printed), it received its third reading in the Commons on March 24th, and was enacted, with the King's message as its preamble.

It is so simple and brief, and so relevant to the inquiry which is the subject of this book, that it is worth printing it in full here, so that we, unlike the Commons of the day, can follow it easily. (I have not repeated the preamble in setting it out.)

### THE ROYAL MARRIAGES ACT, 1772

*12 George 3. A.D. 1772, Chapter XI*

AN ACT FOR THE BETTER REGULATING  
THE FUTURE MARRIAGES OF THE ROYAL  
FAMILY

*Be it enacted:—*

#### SECTION I

That no descendant of the body of His late Majesty King George the Second, male or female, (other than the issue of princesses who have married, or may hereafter marry, into foreign families), shall be capable of contracting matrimony without the previous consent of His Majesty, his heirs or successors, signified under the great seal, and declared in council (which consent, to preserve the memory thereof, is hereby directed to be set out in the licence and register of marriage, and to be entered in the books of the Privy Council); and that every marriage, or matrimonial contract, of any such descendant, without such consent first had and obtained, shall be null and void to all intents and purposes whatsoever.

#### SECTION 2

Provided always that in case any such descendant of the body of His late Majesty King George the Second, being above the age of twenty-five years, shall persist in his or her resolution to contract a marriage disapproved of, or dissented from, by the King, his heirs, or successors; that then such descendant upon giving notice to the King's Privy Council, which notice is hereby directed to be entered in the books thereof, may, at any time from the expiration of twelve calendar months after such notice given to the Privy Council as aforesaid, contract such marriage; and his or her marriage with the person before proposed and



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rejected, may be duly solemnized, without the previous consent of His Majesty, his heirs, or successors; and such marriage shall be good, as if this Act had never been made, unless both Houses of Parliament shall, before the expiration of the said twelve months, expressly declare their disapprobation of such intended marriage.

### SECTION 3

And every person who shall knowingly or wilfully presume to solemnize, or to assist or to be present at the celebration of, any marriage with any such descendant, or at his or her making any matrimonial contract, without such consent as aforesaid first had and obtained, except in the case above mentioned, shall, being duly convicted thereof, incur and suffer the pains and penalties ordained and provided by the Statute of Provision and Praemunire, made in the sixteenth year of the reign of Richard the Second.

In other words, and briefly, the bill precluded any member of the royal family from contracting marriage under the age of twenty-five without the sovereign's permission, and after that age until twelve months' notice had been given to the Privy Council, and then only provided that both Houses of Parliament should not have expressly declared their disapprobation during that year. Anyone who helped them marry without consent would be severely punished.

The King had got less than he had asked for. Still, he had his Act, and, in effect, what he wanted.

The surprising thing (unless one understands the political mechanism of the day), is that no one but he wanted it, and yet it was passed into law. No man, even among those who defended it, had a convincing word to say in its favour, and those who spoke against it made no effort to contain their horror and resentment.

It was opposed in both Houses on many grounds. The principal ones were:

*That it was 'absurd and unconstitutional'.* The Crown had never in fact had the right George now claimed over marriages in the royal family, or how could John of Gaunt have got away with his 'very imprudent match with a widow who had four children'? Had it existed, the King would have already used it

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against Cumberland. It was just because it did not that he sought it.

The whole bill was founded on this assertion in the King's preamble, and therefore collapsed. To enact it would be adding a fresh right to the royal prerogative, the mere thought of which made the flesh of Parliamentarians creep, and brought to their lips the ugly words, Star Chamber. The great Lord Chatham, too ill to attend, sent a letter to be read in the debate, in which he called it 'new-fangled', and the powers given to the King by it 'wanton and tyrannical'.

*That it was un-English.* Although there was not a word in the bill to suggest an intention to disapprove of marriages to English men or women, it was taken for granted that this was its main purpose. The nobility, from whose ranks brides and bridegrooms for the royal family might be expected to emerge, considered the bill an insult, 'giving leave', as one peer rather exaggeratedly claimed, 'to princes of the blood to lie with our wives, and forbidding them to marry our daughters'. Commoners, being Englishmen, resented the idea that any free-born Briton was not more than good enough for any petty German princeling, and pointed out that Queen Elizabeth and Queen Anne had both had the blood of commoners in their veins.

Both peers and commoners alike writhed at the thought that, should any such marriage take place, it would automatically be nullified and the children made bastards. And this from the man who in his first speech from the throne had boasted to them that he gloried in the name of Briton!

'If they mean a marriage with a native is improper, let them say so!' This thunderous challenge in the Commons expressed the mood of both Houses.

*That it was against the law of God.* Parliament had just previously been considering the Thirty-Nine Articles, and had affirmed them. One of them was to the effect that all Christians had the right to marry.

This bill, it was said, was 'directly against the earliest command given by God to mankind . . . and utterly incompatible with all religion, natural and revealed'.

*That it was against the law of nature.* Marriage was 'a natural right inherent in mankind'. The desire for 'domestic society and comfort', and for 'lawful posterity' were instincts planted in us

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by 'the Author of our nature', and should not be wantonly interfered with.

*That it was against the law of man.* That is to say, that it was contrary to sound juridical principles, 'because the law of nature and divine institutions are not reversible by the power of human legislatures'. Or, put another way, such powers were 'above the reach of any legislature, as contrary to the original inherent rights of human nature, which, as they are not derived from, or held under civil laws, by no civil laws whatsoever can be taken away'.

*That it was partial and personal and not based on any proper general principle.* It was openly said that the bill was introduced out of pique at the known marriage of Cumberland and the rumoured marriage of Gloucester. It was feared that it might be used retrospectively, thus causing great hardship, out of revenge. Also, as the Hanoverians invariably detested their first-born sons and preferred their second sons, there were hideous possibilities of blocking the issue of the former from the Throne.

*That it carried the power of the King outside Great Britain, which was absurd.* Only the issue of princesses marrying into foreign families were exempted from his authority. Yet others in the line of succession might be outside his jurisdiction. (Should, for instance, as was to happen, a royal prince become a European king, the marriages of his children, by this bill, would be subject to the approval of the King of England.) This was 'warranted by no law', and 'contrary to common sense'.

*That Parliament could find itself in an impossible dilemma.* Supposing a member of the royal family, having failed to obtain the sovereign's consent, and being over twenty-five, appealed to Parliament, then Parliament must either offend the King by remaining silent, and thus permitting the marriage, or offend against the laws of God, man and nature by prohibiting a marriage. One noble lord held that Parliament 'can never do otherwise than agree with the King on such an occasion. To differ with him would be such an affront to a King that if he was in Parliament at such a time he would rather agree to what he did not like than put such an affront upon a King.'

*That it could have the force of a perpetual restraint.* That is, it might stop someone from getting married for ever, for if both the King and Parliament should express disapproval, there was

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no further appeal. It was one thing to regulate a marriage, and quite another to take away the right to marry for ever, and the law giving such restraint, or conferring such a power, 'must be null and void in itself'.

*That Parliament was not a sure safeguard.* The bill was the better for the insertion of the parliamentary loophole, but even that might be thwarted when Parliament could be influenced by the King, 'in corrupt or violent times'. And the parliament of the day was accused of being so 'ductile' as to come to Westminster, if bidden, 'on their heads'.

*That its undesirability apart, it did not even secure its professed objects.* If protecting 'the honour and dignity' of the succession to the Crown was its real object (and not mere personal power over the royal family), there were curious oversights in this bill.

For instance, the King had not sought to obtain any power of approval over the marriages of the issue of the princesses married into foreign families, and yet those children might well come to the throne. The King himself sat there because of his descent from the Electress Sophia.

Then again, what protection did the bill give against the foolish marriage of the one person most important of all to the succession, the King himself? He could choose his wife at any age or at any time.

Thirdly, no provision was made for a regency. Did the power of approval go to a regent or not? If so, no one needed to point out how it might be abused; and a man could be regent at twenty-one. If not, the whole royal family could die out before a legal marriage could be contracted.

*That if it were desired to protect the succession, that could be achieved by less severe measures,* e.g. by compulsory renunciation of the succession by those whose marriages were not approved. The powers given to the King were much too extensive for their purpose, and Heaven knew where they might not lead.

*That it was despotic.* Why not define a suitable marriage, or even an improper one, it was asked, and consult Parliament? It was 'not the least absurdity of this bill that there is no definition of an improper marriage, but every King upon his arrival at the throne is (I suppose instinctively) endued with a power of distinguishing it, and left at liberty to put his own ideas in

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execution, however capricious, absurd, whimsical, extravagant or unreasonable they may be'.

Again, 'If a marriage of any given description is thought exceptionable by the sovereign, consult the free judgment of the legislature; and if they think so too, let there be no possibility of contracting such a marriage. But do not have it discretionary—discretionary power is the very essence of tyranny, and only a more courtly term for despotism.'

It would be, it was felt, 'a milder act, and more reconcilable to the love of freedom to ascertain even the most trifling particulars, to declare for instance, the age, or the name, or the country whence some future bride or bridegroom of the royal family should be elected, than thus to give the power of a universal negative upon any and every choice.'

The bill was 'a mere act of power'.

*That it was wrong to annul marriages.* Lord Camden, a gouty peer, attending briefly despite a sharp attack, said 'that it would be better not to annul the marriage when made by persons of years of discretion, but lay all other restraints and terrors; make it necessary to have the banns published in St. James's Chapel; lay heavy penalties on the offending party; banish him forever from the Court; incapacitate him, if you will, from sitting in Parliament; but do not annul a marriage between persons of age.'

*That too many people would in time be involved.* Hypothetical censuses of the descendants of George II numbered them in 'many thousands' in 'a very short time', and fears were expressed at the conception of finding the entire public service staffed by men bound to fawn upon the King if they were to get wives. Once the principle of the bill were admitted, why should not the descendants of the Stuarts be brought under its aegis? And, if that were to happen, there were already many commoners (citing an alehouse keeper in point) with royal blood in their veins who stood in jeopardy.

*That it would lead to civil war in the future.* There might come to the throne a King who would repeal the act, and legitimate children of an annulled marriage; and thus cause dissensions between them and others who had previously occupied their places in the succession. Or there might arise a Pretender's party, strong in the belief that his claim had been set aside by an unjust and unconstitutional act.

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*That the precise effects of the penalties of præmunire were not known.* *Præmunire* (meaning, be warned) was the first word of various statutes, then obsolescent, if not obsolete, and which had been directed mainly towards preventing any spread of the Pope's powers in pre-Reformation England. The penalties had included total forfeiture of all goods and estates, imprisonment at the King's will (the prisoner not to be relieved, even if starving) and deprivation of the protection of the Crown.

But what did all this mean in the year 1772?

And were not such dire-sounding penalties excessive for an offence which might amount to no more than innocently being present at a ceremony, or even a mere verbal exchange of vows, since such could then constitute a contract of marriage?

The only thing to be said for the penalty clause was that it contained a major error, in that the statute cited was non-existent, and 'consequently the clause would be in effect void, if ever attempted to be put in execution'. But still, no one could be quite sure of that.

*That it bore hard on the royal family to extend their non-age to twenty-five, and perhaps for ever.* The bill was in reality an effort 'to keep men and women in a state of endless non-age, which, unless in the case of idiots or incurable lunatics, would be absurd, unjust, and a manifest violation of the law of nature.'

'Put yourselves in their case and see how you like it,' pleaded one peer, '... for surely you would not do by others differently than you would do by yourselves?'

It seemed 'indecent to the royal family to suppose that they were not to be arrived at the age of discretion as soon as the lowest of the realm'; and the noble lords could not conceive 'but they may be as capable of choosing a wife at the age of twenty-one, as of being entrusted with the regency of the kingdom, of which by law they are at that age capable.'

They also felt that 'deferring the age of minority as to marriage till twenty-six was impolite and dangerous, as it may tend to drive them into a disorderly course of life.'

In the Commons Mr. Dowdeswell, a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, echoed this point. Why discriminate against the royal family, he asked? 'Did their understanding ripen more slowly, or were they men later?' He was taken up by the press. In most of the daily papers the following verses appeared.

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*Quoth Dick to Tom, 'This Act appears  
Absurd, as I'm alive!  
To take the Crown at eighteen years,  
The wife at twenty-five!*

*The myst'ry how shall we explain?  
For sure, as Dowdeswell said,  
Thus early if they're fit to reign  
They must be fit to wed!'*

*Quoth Tom to Dick, 'Thou art a fool,  
And little know'st of life.  
Alas! 'tis easier far to rule  
A kingdom than a wife!'*

It is interesting to notice that, though some noble souls went so far as to sympathize with the princes, no one gave a serious thought to the princesses. Yet they were to be by far the greatest sufferers from the effects of this bill.

So much thought was expended in ingenious objections! To take a single example: the King's power might render an heir-presumptive subject to alternately strict and less strict supervision in his courtship. 'A man may be heir-presumptive today, not heir-presumptive tomorrow, and heir-presumptive again the next day. In the instance of His present Majesty, if he had been so unfortunate as to have lost his children soon after their birth, the next brother of His Majesty might have been nine times in that situation, and eight times out of it in the last ten years.'

So much imagination was applied to conjuring up bogies which never materialized, from civil war to statutorily celibate ale-house keepers with the blood royal of England in their veins!

It is ironical that no one seems to have caught a glimmer of the truly cruel results that this bill was in fact destined to bring about for the six princesses.

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In the face of this opposition, stout, loud and long, what had Lord North and his supporters to say? How did the fearsome Thurlow defend the bill?

Here was a man to be reckoned with, a blustering, overbearing

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ruffian, whose beetling black eyebrows and great beak of a nose filled the most intrepid with terror, even before he opened his mouth to bay out some pulverizing brutality. Here was a formidable defender for a bill!

There is an old saying at the Bar: When you have the law on your side, hammer it into the judge; when you have the facts on your side, hammer them into the jury; when you have neither the law nor the facts on your side, hammer hell into the table!

Lord Thurlow contented himself with such assertions as that he stood four-square on 'every clause, every sentence, every syllable, every word, and every letter' in the bill, that he 'would not consent to any amendment whatsoever', and that, indeed, 'it could not be mended'.

When forced to deploy his full legal armoury in defence of it, he was driven to such shifts as declaring that 'this is not against religion to annul marriages', for it had been done 'in the Act to prevent lunatics from marrying'; or dismissing the difficulties as to what the penalties of *præmunire* really meant by saying that they really didn't matter, for they were 'only *in terrorem*'.

Such explanations as Lord North felt obliged to give were shambling and heartless; as, for instance, when he baldly stated, without attempting to justify his statement, that the bill would not be used retrospectively to annul Cumberland's marriage.

'Lord North is like a School Boy who has had a hard task imposed on him,' said a newspaper. 'Though he continually counts his lesson he cannot get it by heart.'

At one stage the entire Treasury bench seems to have gone to sleep, with the result that the bill was within an ace of being thrown out, as its supporters, only half-awake, imagined they were dividing on an Opposition amendment on a motion to sit again!

The Opposition fought the bill 'inch by inch' and word by word. They proposed amendment after amendment. But they could not 'contend against numbers'. The Government relied on empty benches and full lobbies. They asked their friends, whatever they thought of the bill, to oblige the King, who wanted it. They locked the doors, refusing the press, the public, and even the peers, entrance, in an unprecedented access of secretiveness. Determined to make all speed, they debated into the small hours night after night, another very unusual proceeding. For the rest,



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they sat out the storm. Parliamentary reporting at the time was, it is true, meagre, partial and capricious; but, after making all allowances for such limitations, it is clear that the Government party did nothing for the bill but vote for it.

They were lukewarm, Heaven knew, as was shown when at the last moment a proposal to limit it to the lifetime of George III was defeated by only eighteen votes—which might have been six if a dozen opposition voters had not been locked out.

Perhaps the tone of the Commons is best conveyed by giving an extract from the speech of one of its most colourful members. Colonel Barré was a massive, swarthy, and slightly sinister figure with, we learn, 'a savage glare to his eyes' from a bullet lodged loosely in his cheek. He hated the King, and the King hated him, and had lately deprived him of his commission in the Army 'for voting the wrong way'.

The bill was 'a King's measure' Barré declared in a speech which lasted till three in the morning.

'Who then wonders that the whole kingdom is set in motion, and that members who seldom honour these walls with their presence are pressed into their service? I have no doubt but that we shall soon feel the effects of such an extraordinary effort in the arrears of the Civil List . . . I therefore congratulate the abettors of the bill upon the prospect of the fine harvest which lies before them. The Crown will certainly show its gratitude for so great an accession of prerogative; what though this violent act tears away the brightest jewel in His Majesty's diadem, the affection of the people, and in its place substitutes fear and jealousy? . . . *Oderint dum metuant* seems now to be the favourite maxim inculcated by those whom the King delighteth to honour.'

While pointing out what an insult was being paid to members of the royal family in treating them like idiots or lunatics, he inveighed against the King's hubristic reservation of the right to approve his own marriage.

'In order to make amends, the King himself, let him be ever so young, ever so ignorant and inexperienced, is supposed to be at eighteen endowed with every good quality both of head and heart, being invested to provide himself a proper consort, and to act as a guardian to his former guardian, to the man who was perhaps regent of the realm, superintended his education, and provided him with swaddling clothes.'

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His hearers must have smiled.

'Sirs, you need not smile. Princes, like other mortals, must be rocked in their cradles, and have their rattles and hobbyhorses. However much deified upon the throne, they were once but boys. I wish they did not frequently continue so . . . You may give them what epithets you please; you may call them God's vice-regents and vicars-general upon earth. Names will not alter the nature of things. They will not prove less tyrannical and despotic.

'Nay, the higher you exalt them, the more they will trample upon their subjects. When this is the state of the case, why should I wonder that you have chosen this dark and midnight hour for so black and atrocious a deed? This is the murderous season of the night, and you have with propriety pitched upon it, for giving a vital stab to liberty, and for effecting a purpose much more hellish than the gunpowder-treason.

'Kings, Lords and Commons may soon be replaced, all blown up in the air; but a lost constitution who can restore? Men are the offspring of a single generation; but a system of wise laws is the work of ages.'

Strong words. But then, Colonel Barré, and a good many other valiant men, felt strongly on the subject.

All was in vain.

The Duke of Cumberland had married Anne Horton on October 2nd, 1771.

Augusta, Princess of Wales, had died on February 8th, 1772.

The King's message had gone to the Lords on February 20th.

The Royal Marriages Bill received its third reading in the Commons on 24th March.

No time had been lost. King George could feel that he had done something that his dying mother had asked, and that he too wished for. He expressed his appreciation to Lord North for the successful operation, and, a little cynically perhaps, at the close of the session, also to Parliament.

The shadows gathered in the skies above the children in the royal nursery. They were already there to greet those who were yet to be born.

What was said about the Act outside Parliament?

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On the day that it was passed the *Public Advertiser* published a leader on it.

It quoted Mr. Sawbridge, M.P., as having called it 'a bill to gratify the rancour of a monster and the malice of a man'.

It referred delightedly to the motion of Sir Joseph Mawbey to correct the titles of the Act, and 'to make it co-extensive with its contents', by adding the words, 'An act for enlarging and extending the prerogative of the crown, and for the encouragement of adultery and fornication, under the pretence of regulating the marriages of the royal family.'

'The Royal Marriages Bill', it went on, 'has now passed our most faithful Commons . . . so that every descendant of our now more-than-ever-to-be-lamented sovereign, George the Second, is in vassalage and slavery, and the kings of this limited monarchy are erected into family tyrants, to trample upon the laws of nature and religion. One resource of comfort still remains—the reflexion that the arbitrary acts of a despotic house were all repealed by his beneficent son, King Edward VI.'

The King's use of bribery was blatantly referred to.

'The Royal Marriage [*sic*] Bill has been passed to the expence of two British baronies, five Irish ditto, one advancement from ditto to an Irish earldom, one blue ribbon, three red ones, the baronetage, three reversionary patent places, twenty-five thousand pounds in occasional gratuities, besides innumerable promises of lottery tickets. In so very interesting and constitutional a light is this bill seen by our worthy representatives.'

Opposition to the Act lasted long after it became law. Many, because it seemed impossible that anything so wrong-headed and so illiberal could last, believed that it would not. They looked forward to the day when it would be repealed, or, failing that, be considered to have fallen into desuetude.

When the King died, they felt, it would die with him. It might even be avoided with impunity while he still lived, by anyone who cared to take a grave risk, and subject loyal friends to the vague but frightening penalties of *præmunire*.

The Prince of Wales in due course openly expressed his dislike of it and said that he would repeal it as soon as he came to the throne.

Even a change of Government might undo the damage, however.

Failing all that, the Whigs, at any rate, felt sure that the whole thing would break down on the first occasion on which it was put to the proof.

It was a preposterous Act, 'un-English, arbitrary, opposed to natural law, and contrary to the law of God'. It would never do. It could not last.

It is still in force today.

PART III

*‘Some Distant Region’*



## CHAPTER 7

### *The Trap Springs Shut*

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In looking into the factors which influenced Sophia's life so that she was far less a free agent than any ordinary subject in the kingdom, we have so far examined her father's ancestry (which was hers too, of course, we should not forget) and his character, which was largely the result of war between dominant hereditary traits and a singularly strict, narrow, and isolated upbringing.

We have seen the results in his self-abnegation and his marriage, and in the kind of background he provided for his family.

We have seen his passionate response to the marriages of his brothers, and the obstinacy with which he sought revenge to all time on those with obligations similar to his own who might not wish to be as self-sacrificing as he had been.

We have seen that he achieved that purpose against the clearly-expressed wishes of his people, and how he managed to do so.

Now we are brought face to face with yet another factor, in some ways the most terrible and insurmountable of all those which were to operate against the unfortunate princesses and their natural desires to love and be mated.

This was to make its appearance in a horrifying and dramatic way about the time of Sophia's eleventh birthday. In reality it had been present long before then, secretly lurking. After that time it would be known by all, and recognized as something which had to be taken into account in any matter which concerned the King closely.

Before I ask the reader to go back to Sophia's birthday, on November 3rd, 1788, I should, perhaps, for the sake of clarity and ease of reference enlarge somewhat on the bare list of the children of George III set out in an earlier chapter. From now on references to one or other of the brothers and sisters who made

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up Sophia's family, and who were alike affected by her circumstances, are inevitable.

Fifteen different people are a considerable number to get hold of and differentiate clearly, one from another, more than a playwright would lightly fit into a cast. How much more difficult this task becomes with the children of kings, the princes bearing two or three titles successively or even concurrently, and the princesses perhaps changing their names to foreign ones on marriage, I know to my cost.

Perhaps the best method of grasping the different characters of the children of George III is to start from the picture painted by the American Quaker, Benjamin West, of the Queen surrounded by her family, at Windsor, in the year 1779, when Sophia was rising two.

There, grouped before a backdrop of the Castle, are thirteen of the fifteen children. Sophia is already 'the old baby', for Octavius the eighth son, can be seen in long clothes in a baby carriage. He has been added at the last moment by the harassed artist, who had continually to be painting out what he had accomplished in order to put in the latest addition to this seemingly never-ending family.

Sophia herself stands next to the baby-carriage of the baby she calls her 'son': a plump, self-possessed little person in a flounced cap and hooped skirt reaching to the ground. She is probably wearing her full-dress costume for parading before the populace at Windsor.

After finding Sophia we look as a matter of course for the Prince of Wales, and we place him easily enough after a moment.

He is not alone, but close to his dearest friend and brother, Frederick, the second son. There they stand, toweringly apart, sashed, pale-breeched, cocked-hatted, booted, starred and nonchalantly splendid, two tall young men, the first in the kingdom after the King, their father, and very much aware of it.

The eldest, Prinny to his familiars then (and still Prinny to the devoted admirers who follow his uninhibited doings in their library books), is seventeen. He carries a cane and white gloves and his free hand is tucked into a low-cut satin waistcoat. He is already touched with the golden glow of kingship. He is also already a little plump; on the whole well made, 'tho' rather too great a



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penchant to grow fat', as he put it himself at the very time. We find, like him, that his features are pleasing, but too full of petulance—'*hauteur*' was *his* word—and 'his eyes, tho' none of the best and tho' grey, are yet passable, tolerable good eyebrows and eyelashes, *un petit nez retroussé cependant assez aimé*, a good mouth tho' rather large, with fine teeth, a tolerable good chin, but the whole of the countenance is too round. I forgot to add very uggly ears.' Perhaps this little quotation illustrates as well as any his unusual combination of insufferable conceit and disarming charm.

This eldest son, his mother's favourite, has, true to the family tradition, already run foul of his father. He was always to maintain that the King hated him since he was seven years old. Perhaps so, but he was self-willed, self-indulgent, and hot-tempered, he balked at the plain, pure regime of his life, and was all too like his grandfather, Poor Fred, especially in his tendencies to lying and deceit.

'You know that I don't speak the truth, and my brothers don't, and I find it a great defect, from which I would have my daughter free,' he was to say himself later.

Already Prinny had embarked on the first of his many love-affairs. This one was an innocent bout of calf love for Mary Hamilton, six years older than he, who had come into the household at the time of Sophia's birth, and who looked after the little girls, Prinny's sisters. *Billets doux*, locks of hair and bracelets went from Prinny to her: a pretty prelude to later affairs, none of which were innocent, and all of which were painful.

Frederick, leaning affectionately on his shoulder, is the future Duke of York and Commander-in-Chief of the Army, whose squalid passing half a century thence was to be comforted by the prayers of the infant Sophia standing in the picture, quite ignored and quite composed, at his feet.

It is hard to recognize 'the soldiers' friend' in this princeling, harder still to believe that he is (and has been since the age of seven months) the Bishop of Osnaburg. Frederick is the King's favourite son (not counting the infant of the moment), and no wonder. Handsome, athletic, quick and keen, he had other claims on his father's heart than merely being the second son.

On the far side of the group is another pair of princes.

One of the two boys wears a short coat and carries a billycock.

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His chin is firmly set, his pointed pineapple head confidently tilted, his naval uniform and his new star and sash are carried with a manly dash, but he is hardly more than a child.

The other boy, dependently clutching his brother's arm, and peering blankly and uncomprehendingly out at the future at which the young sailor stares so confidently, still has the unmistakable softness of the twelve-year-old.

The sailor-boy with the sharp head and the very red face is the future King William IV. The King has sent his third son into the navy, and William will soon join his ship, the *Prince George*.

The younger boy, the future Duke of Kent, whose claim to fame is that he fathered Queen Victoria, lives with William in one of the pretty red-brick houses on Kew Green, nursing grievances against his father for his strictness. There is no trace in the soft-faced boy of the almost maniac cruelty of character that he is to develop.

The central group of the picture, of three boys this time, is arranged about the baby carriage of the infant Octavius. The eldest, the eight-year-old Ernest, is the future Duke of Cumberland, whose name will make the nation shudder, even as his great-uncle's, 'Butcher' Cumberland's, had done, and perhaps as unjustly. Here he holds the drawing-bar which projects from the front of the carriage much as from the old-fashioned bath chair, and, it must be admitted, looks neither robust nor frank, nor in any other way appealing. He is to come into Sophia's story in a particularly hideous way. Here, however, in 1779, he is only a slightly unattractive little boy playing with a baby's carriage.

At Ernest's feet is the future Duke of Sussex. He has been affected by asthma from infancy, and he lies beside the dog as if not robust enough to stand and pose for any length of time. He is a pretty boy. He will spend most of his youth abroad because the air of England does not suit him.

Behind the baby carriage, as though about to give it a starting push, is the youngest of the boys, if we do not count Octavius, the baby.

He is Adolphus (Dolly to his sisters), later Duke of Cambridge. There is not much to be said of Adolphus, then or later, perhaps because he was the only son of George III to live above the age of four and keep all the commandments. He has been almost completely forgotten.

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These three youngest boys, Ernest, Augustus and Adolphus, are quite soon to leave the family circle to enter the University of Göttingen, near Hanover.

So much for the sons. What of the daughters, Sophia's sisters?

Next to Sophia, by the baby carriage, is her favourite sister, and the one nearest to her in age, Mary, 'dearest Minny', the beauty of the family.

Behind Sophia and Mary are the three eldest sisters, Charlotte, the Princess Royal, aged thirteen, Augusta, aged eleven, and Elizabeth, nine, whom the undefeatably sentimental Fanny Burney managed to describe as 'all handsome, the first for figure, the second for countenance, and the third for face'. But to the gushing Fanny, of course, 'never, in tale or fable, were there six sister princesses more lovely'. Perhaps she exaggerated. Lady Mary Coke, for one, found the Princess Royal 'very plain', and she was noted for her clumsiness and poor taste in dress; and Augusta and Elizabeth were solid girls, though perhaps fine upstanding ones in youth.

Elizabeth was the artist of the family. Of the others there is not much to be said at this stage.

They were simple, good girls, who led a simple, narrow life, and since they were not disobedient, or restive like Prinny, and could not go out into the world like William, the most to be discovered about them at this period concerns their unimpressive, if ladylike, accomplishments, their clothes, and their appearances.

\* \* \*

The family, as I have said, was not complete in 1779, when the West group was painted. Two more children were yet to be born, a boy, Alfred, and a girl, Amelia.

In the summer of the next year the Queen was awaiting Alfred's birth, and Sophia and Elizabeth (then nearly three and ten, respectively) were sent away to 'East Bourn'. Mary Hamilton, Prinny's love, watching them playing in a garden, wrote tenderly:

'Princess Elizabeth and my sweet engaging child, Princess Sophia, are playing about like butterflies in the sun, and culling wild flowers in the grass, whilst I am watching them . . .

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Adieu, the wind blows my paper about, and my dear children wish me to play with them.'

In September the King wrote to tell Elizabeth of her new brother's arrival.

'Sophia says she has got a little grandson,' she replied, 'Octavius she calls her son. The cannons fired from the ships and from the beach both yesterday and today.'

Three years later the sixth princess, the fifteenth child, the little Amelia, was born. The royal nursery was at last complete.

Ten years after the date of the Benjamin West picture the scene is very different. A Hogarth would be a fitter artist for portraying a family group of the Guelphs as they now appear.

We are again at Windsor; but it is a bitterly cold winter, and this time the setting is indoors.

Queen Charlotte's face is buried in her outstretched arms, which lie flung across the table at which she has sat, unapproachable, fasting and drinking nothing but barley water, for two days. Her hair (that once dark and silken hair, a lock of which the young King had held up to a candle's light to examine and approve) seems suddenly to have gone grey, and she refuses to have it tended or herself dressed. At night she has been persuaded to go to bed, but not to sleep. The faithful, unpleasant Miss Goldsworthy, fated to act the part of dragon to the princesses for many long years, sits and reads to her.

Here is no longer the stiff, silent and formal queen, but merely a middle-aged woman, crazed with shock, frightened and despairing. Across the channel an even blacker fate closes in on another woman who sits on a throne, but Queen Charlotte of England probably believes herself at this moment to be the most unhappy queen in Europe.

She does not, at this stage, weep, and her silent horror is contained in a greater silence, the pregnant stillness which comes, whether to a house or a castle, only when something more frightening even than death itself has entered within its walls.

She listens, with all the other silent listeners, and shudders at the hoarse cries ringing through the castle, the voice of a man who calls on God to strike him dead before the thing he too fears should overtake him.

The princesses are stricken too. The young ones, Mary,

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Sophia and the baby Amelia, encompass the tragedy with childhood's instinctive emotional comprehension of disaster. The three elder ones grasp it with a clearer, sharper, more adult appreciation of its implications, and a stultifying knowledge of the name by which that disaster is called. They will never be able to bring themselves to call it by the simple short name by which it is known in the world outside.

Their brothers—except for the eldest—are all away. The news has not yet reached them, but it soon will. The university at which the King's three youngest sons are studying, loyally devoted to him who is Elector of Hanover to its professors before he is King of England, will be plunged in grief.

The crisis which effectually altered the whole nature of this family, and, whatever superficial reconciliations the future might bring, virtually destroyed all that it had of unity, is upon them. Things are never to be the same again.

For Sophia and her sisters, particularly, a greater burden and a more crippling handicap still than those which their royal birth and their father's obsessional views on royal marriages had already imposed on them is henceforth to be fastened upon their lives.

A hundred and seventy years later we can use the words which no one inside those palace walls dared speak.

The King is mad.

## CHAPTER 8

### *'Some Distant Region'*

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In seeking an answer to the riddle of Princess Sophia it is necessary to understand the progress and causes of the madness of King George III.

The experiences she and her sisters then went through, and the belief that their behaviour could cause them to be repeated, dominated their lives.

Although the reports of the examinations of the King's physicians concerning his illness, by both houses of Parliament, have always been available to everyone, little has been published on the subject in Great Britain. However, those inhibitions which may have hitherto prevented this being done have now lost their potency. The public attitude to the mechanics of the human mind has changed. Mental illness no longer stains the character. Civilized men have never held anything against those of their fellows who rambled and perhaps became violent in attacks of fever. They were merely 'delirious', they said, and would recover. Now, as knowledge of the mind grows, we no longer think any the worse of those of us who, without fever or other easily recognizable physical derangement, behave and speak strangely and make physical attacks upon others.

Today, when we realize that twenty per cent of our population passes through mental homes, and that perhaps one in five of us will have been mad for a period before we die, we can look, as we always should have looked, upon such sufferers as only ill, and most of them temporarily ill at that. Today, we know that for every one of us there is, in the old-fashioned phrase, 'madness in the family'.

In this climate, then, a writer who today enters upon an examination of the aberrations of King George III is not, as he might formerly have been, open to reproach for some sort of retrospective *lèse majesté*, nor need those who read the following

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pages with compassion and a very literal sympathy feel that their interest is a morbid one.

As it happens, few cases of mental illness can have been more richly documented. Not only have we the diaries and letters of men and women about the court upon which to draw, but we can actually follow the history of this attack of insanity (and of three subsequent ones as well) in minute detail in the medical bulletins, the clinical records, and the lengthy parliamentary inquiries of the time. In fact, we can, if we wish, follow them with day-to-day, and sometimes with hour-to-hour, precision. It is on record to the smallest details what the King said, what he did, how he slept, and what medicines and treatments were prescribed for and administered to him. For psychiatrists there is a gold-mine of information, for, his royal position quite apart, few cases of like abnormality have been documented in such detail in separate attacks and extending over such a lengthy span of life, with half a century between the first attack and the last. The King, who died in his last attack, one of ten years duration, had had a clinical history lasting over fifty-five years. Needless to say, there are also exhaustive data concerning his normal periods with which to compare the abnormal ones. Kings, even when sane, are always under observation, and never was this more true than in the reign of George III.

The onset of the madness of 1788 had not been sudden. Warning signs had begun in early spring. Perhaps the Queen, if none other, knew what they portended, for we are aware today that George III had been mad at least once before, in 1765, when he was only twenty-seven. That attack had been kept a strict secret, the more easily because it inconvenienced him for only a few days at a time, and it had been given out that he was suffering from a feverish cold. Only twenty years after his death was the truth stated in print. Smollett, who mentioned it in his *History of England*, had been obliged to remove his reference from the text.

At Easter, 1788, the famous physician, Dr. Heberden, censured Dr. George Baker, the King's usual doctor, for having attempted to handle the case so long alone, and called in the most outstanding practitioner in the field, Dr. James Munro, the head of Bedlam Asylum.

Despite the fact that Heberden had constant and immediate

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access to the patient by means of a door cut in the wall connecting his premises with the King's, the King grew no better, and in July he was sent to Cheltenham to drink the waters. He was supposed to give up excessive exercise, and eat and drink better than usual, to bring on an attack of the gout. This, according to the vogue medical superstition, would then drive out the other illness, whatever it might be.

The Cheltenham visit was a disaster.

Not only was the King difficult and disobedient—he was never good with doctors—but his behaviour became frighteningly and embarrassingly odd. Formerly plunged in deep depression, he suddenly became another man: exuberantly gay, unnaturally exhilarated, and most undignified. One clownish prank succeeded another. He ran a race with a horse. He sat with the young ladies at their needlework, where he had no business to be, scraping away at an imaginary fiddle to entertain them. He had a house moved out of town by thirty men and set down beside his quarters (which had been borrowed from a helpful peer) to accommodate his son the Duke of York for a flying visit. Always a rapid eater, he stuffed his food so rapidly that, as Fanny Burney wrote in exasperation, 'Whoever attends him must be rapid also, or follow starving.' On an excursion to Gloucester, if we are to believe Thackeray, 'one morning before anybody else was up the King walked about Gloucester town, pushed over Molly the housemaid with her pail, who was scrubbing the doorsteps; ran upstairs, woke all the equerries in their bedrooms, and then trotted down to the bridge, where by this time, a dozen of louts were assembled. "What, is this Gloucester New Bridge?" asked our gracious monarch; and the people answered him, "Yes, your Majesty!" "Why then, my boys," said he, "let us have a huzzay!" After giving them which intellectual gratification, he went home to breakfast.'

That sort of thing was bad enough. Even more embarrassing was the King's sudden and uncontrollable passion for Lady Elizabeth Pembroke, the same stately lady who had been his first love, and who, as ill-luck would have it, had accompanied the Queen to Cheltenham as Lady of the Bedchamber. His 'Eliza', as the King called her, was still beautiful, but she was also (despite her abandonment by her runaway husband) still far from flighty. It would be hard to decide whether she or the



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Queen was the more mortified by the King's unlooked-for behaviour. This from him of all men!

His other old love of more than a quarter of a century before, Lady Sarah, was on his mind too. He asked one Mr. Clements if he were the man who had run away with Lady Sarah Bunbury when he, George, was in love with her. Lady Sarah's husband, Sir Charles Bunbury, had neglected her, and she had run away (taking her newly-born child with her) to the arms of her cousin, Lord William Gordon, for a brief romantic escapade. Years later there had been a divorce, and she had eventually married an able and handsome widower, the Hon. George Napier.

Lady Sarah had already been seven years married to Napier when the King recalled her brief elopement with her cousin, Lord William Gordon, of seventeen years before. It must have wounded him deeply at the time; and it is perhaps worthy of note that he appears to have envied the lover and not the husband.

When the King returned to Windsor in the middle of August he was very much worse than when he had left—because of a surfeit of Cheltenham waters, his physicians explained.

He was ordered complete rest, but continued to flout the doctors. One day he hunted the stag for five hours and then went on to a ball. He and his family played an extraordinary game of hide-and-seek with outsiders, even including his ministers. For months on end they gave out first one excuse and then another for why they could not come to him or he go to them. Even Pitt (to whom incidentally, dealings with an insane autocrat were no new matter, his father having long been similarly afflicted) had to accept 'a sharp bilious attack' as the King's reason for not coming to town. As late as September 19th His Majesty's excuse for not meeting one of his Secretaries of State was a pain in his face.

The King was determined to keep the reins in his hands. Whenever he could he appeared in public. Unsparing as ever of his body, despite the doctors' pleas, he still breakfasted merely on a cup of coffee and a dry biscuit before driving up to London for his strenuous levées and drawing-rooms, still skipped his dinner in the afternoon as often as not, and still frequently arrived home late at night having had nothing but a piece of bread and butter and a cup of tea, or a little fruit eaten as he moved about the drawing-room.

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As the King's judgment became more and more unreliable, these efforts to keep his secret sometimes had the opposite effect.

One anguishing example occurred when the unhelpful Dr. Baker suddenly blundered by selling £18,000 worth of stocks, innocently desiring to take up an advantageous mortgage, and thereby created a near-panic on the sensitive Stock Exchange. Rumours in plenty had already been flying about, and what clearer confirmation could there be of fears of impending constitutional disaster than the King's own doctor selling up a fortune in shares? Baker confessed to the King, and the King 'to stop further lies and any fall of stocks' insisted on going to the levee that afternoon against the doctors' orders.

The doctors were right. His object was not achieved. As Stanhope puts it in his *Life of Pitt*, 'his manner and conversation were such as to cause the most painful uneasiness in several at least of those to whom he spoke'.

Next day he journeyed back to Windsor. As his coach drew up at the Castle door he saw his four youngest daughters waiting to welcome him. He broke down, and went into 'an hysterical fit'.

Things were becoming unmanageable, but still he and his family went doggedly, blindly on, hoping against hope, no doubt, that he would recover as suddenly and as completely as he had done in 1765.

One cannot but admire the sort of crazy courage shown in the efforts of those about him to keep a king with his reason tottering seated on his throne. It is a little reminiscent of those films in which gangsters travel in motor-cars with a corpse, pretending that it is still alive, and even sometimes get out and walk with it, their arms linked jovially in those of their macabre companion. In the case we are considering, however, there is more scope for pity than admiration. Indeed, one does not know whom to pity most: the King, the Queen, the exhausted attendants at Court having to treat a madman like a king and a king like a madman, the doctors in fear of their futures for doing good by force to a disobedient and self-opinionated monarch, or the ministers faced with the terrible problem which they suspected but could not grapple with.

It is easy to forget entirely in looking at these important actors in the drama the three little girls who, equally, were involved in its dreadful complications. Yet they perhaps had most



Queen Charlotte  
(*Alan Ramsay*)



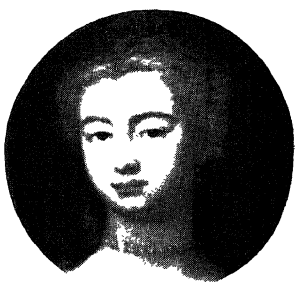
Lord North  
(*N. Dance*)



George III  
(*Sir William Beechey*)



Lord Bute  
(*Sir Joshua Reynolds*)

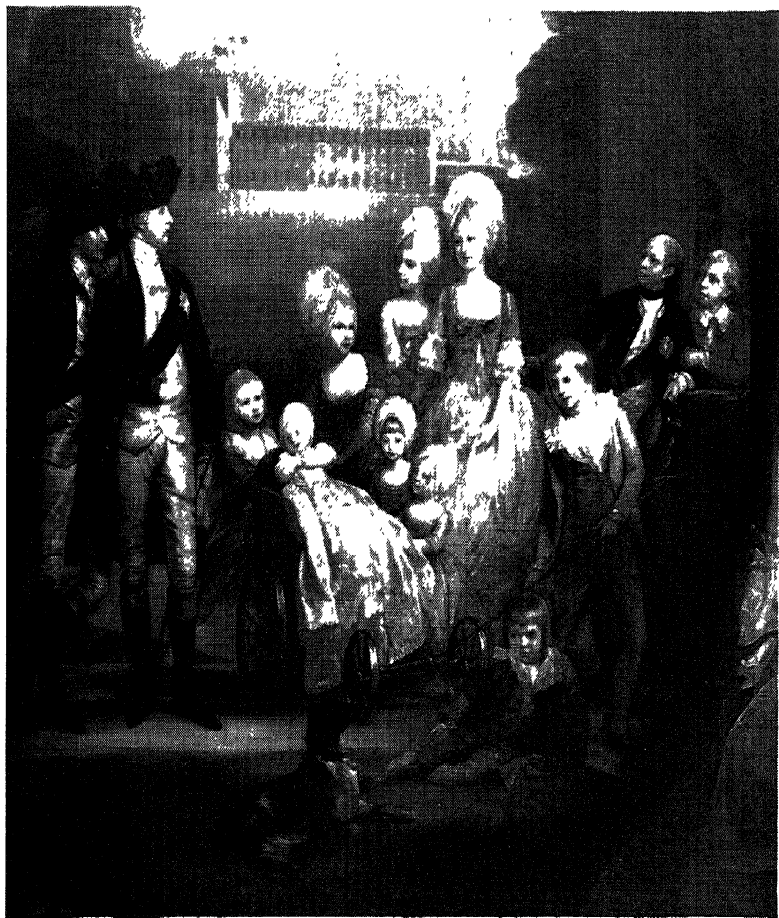


Augusta, Princess of Wales  
(*Charles Philips*)

King George III and those who most affected his early years and the genesis of the Royal Marriages Act: his Queen, his Prime Minister,

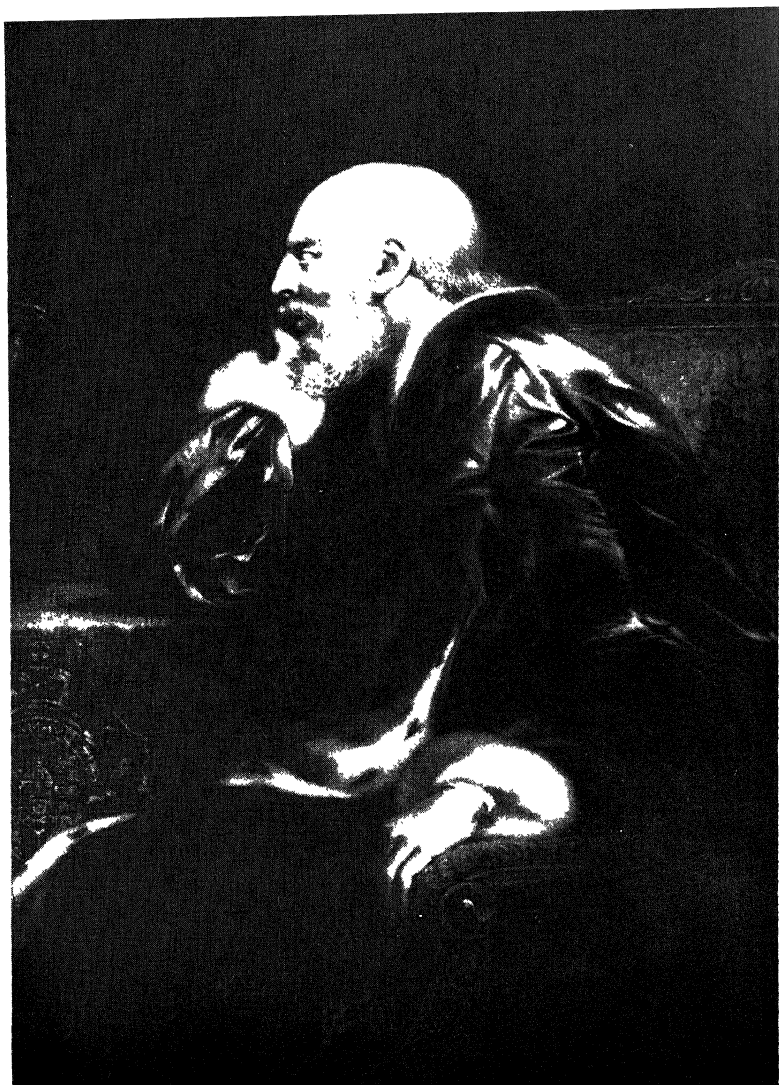


Queen Charlotte in 1793  
(*Sir William Beechey*)



The royal family at Windsor in 1779. Princess Sophia gazes at the new baby and Prince Ernest holds the drawing bar of the baby carriage. The future Duke of York is on the extreme left, beside the Prince of Wales, later George IV. The future King William IV stands in midshipman's uniform beside the future Duke of Kent, Queen Victoria's father

( *Benjamin West* )



King George III in his last illness  
(*Engraving by S. W. Reynolds*)



The Princess Royal as Queen of Württemberg. The eldest, and perhaps the least beautiful, of the six princesses, she was the only one to secure her father's consent to marriage, and the only one to become a queen

*(From a painting by Sir William Beechey)*



Princess Augusta, who longed to be a common soldier's wife, at about  
the time when she met Sir Brent Spencer

*(Sir William Beechey)*





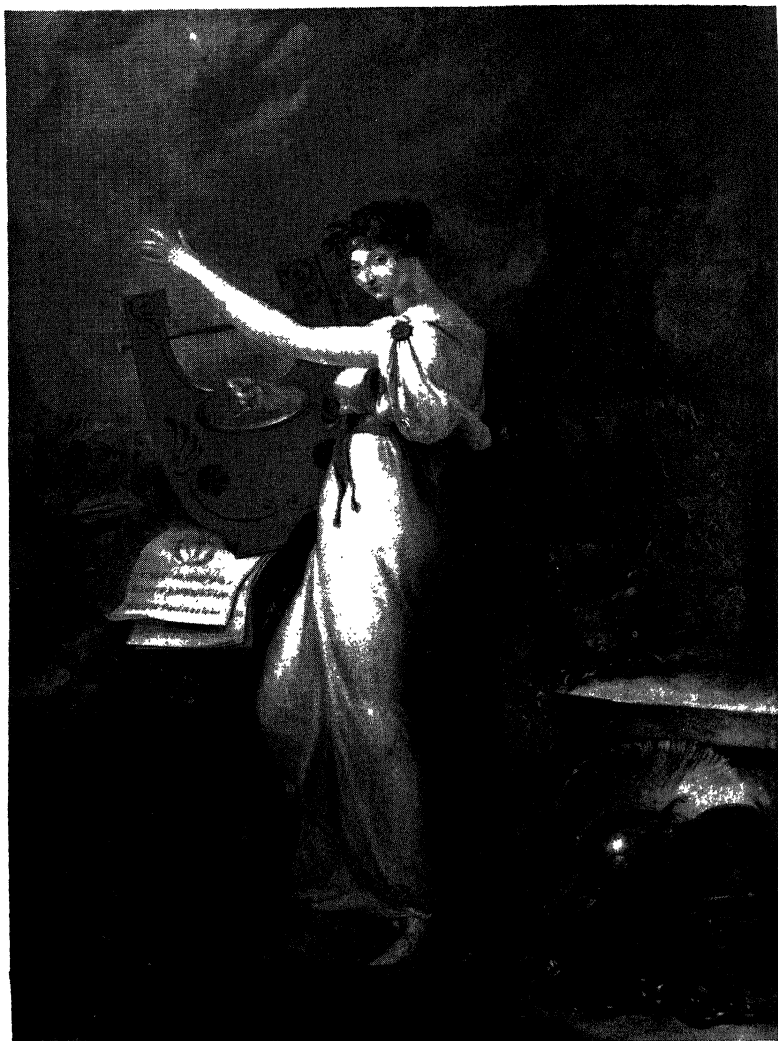
General Sir Brent Spencer, G.C.B.

(*Artist unknown*)



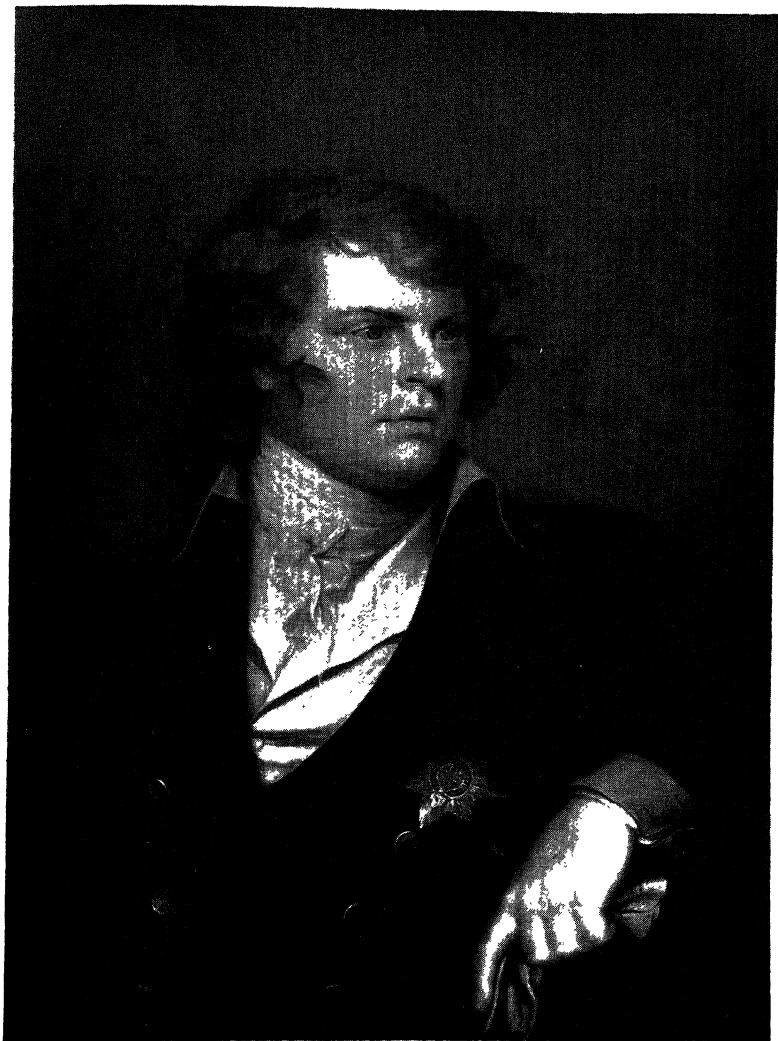
The miniature of Princess Augusta alleged to have been removed from Brent Spencer's neck on his death

(*From a painting by Sir William Beechey*)



Princess Amelia, youngest and best beloved of George III's daughters,  
whose frustrations in love hastened her early death, and her father's  
final surrender to insanity

*(Stroehling)*

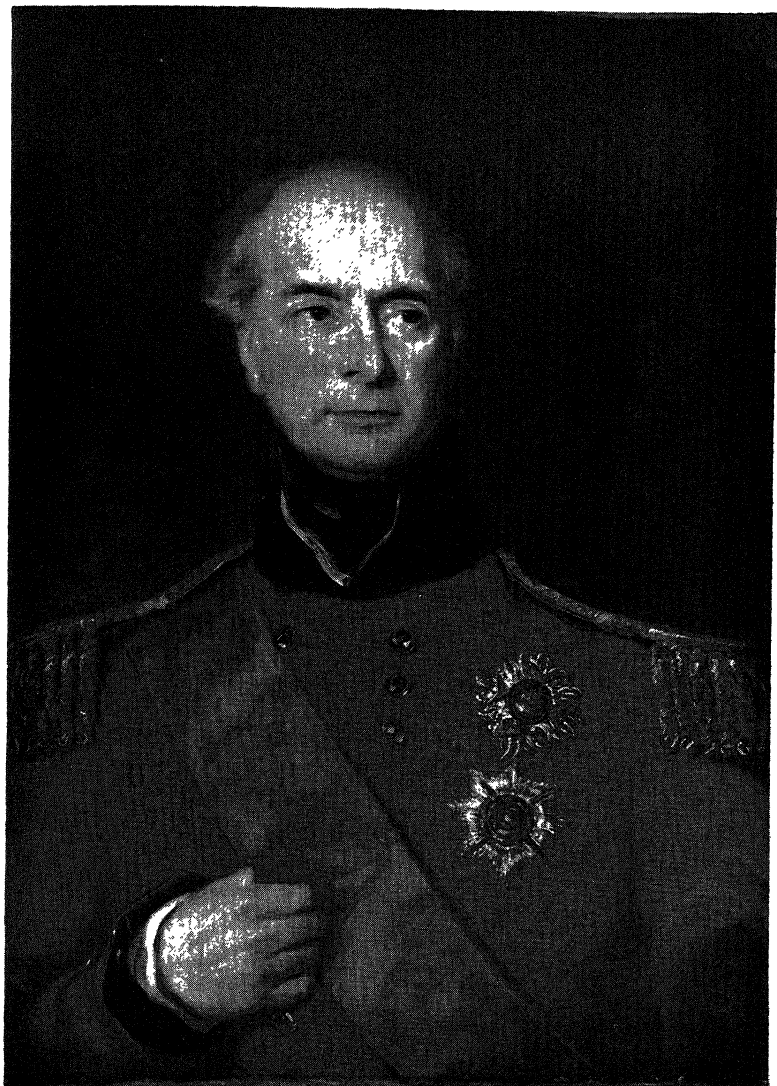


The Duke of Sussex in 1798. The prompt annulment of his 'marriage' in defiance of the Royal Marriages Act blighted any hopes his sisters might have cherished for themselves

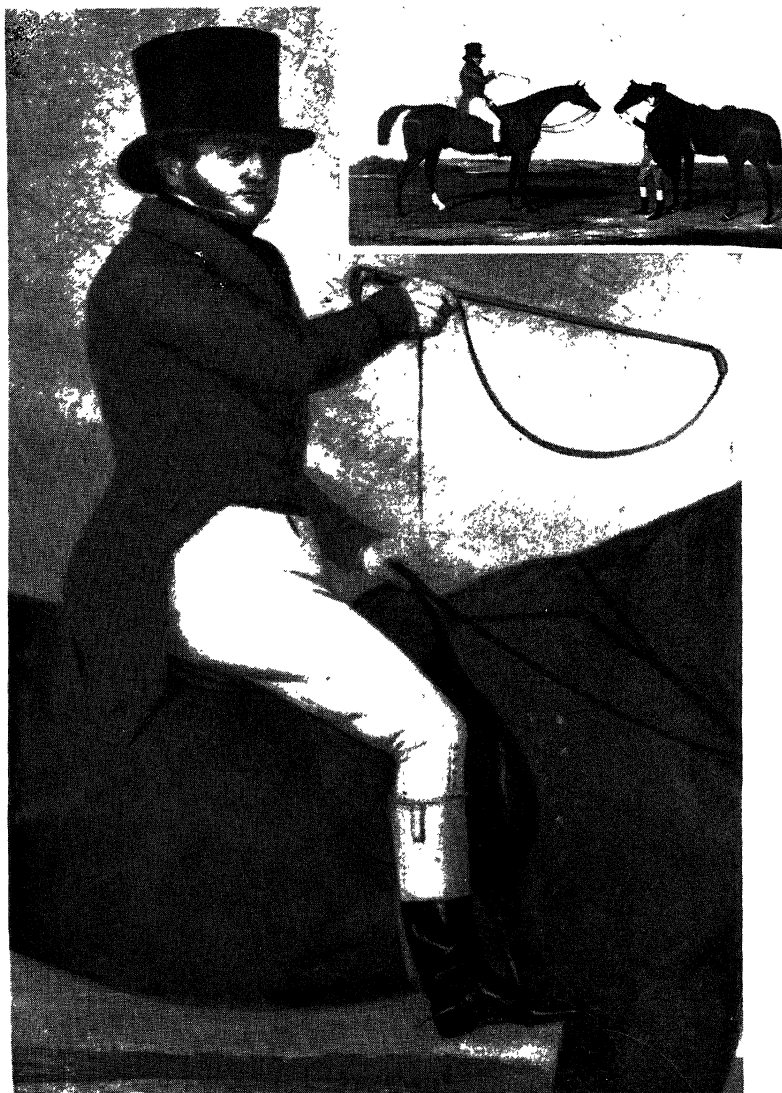
(*G. Head*)



Westmacott, Editor of the *Age*, and Tommy Garth's dubious friend  
(From a drawing by Daniel Maclise for *Fraser's Magazine*)



Sir Herbert Taylor, the man who knew all the secrets and told none  
(*Artist unknown*)

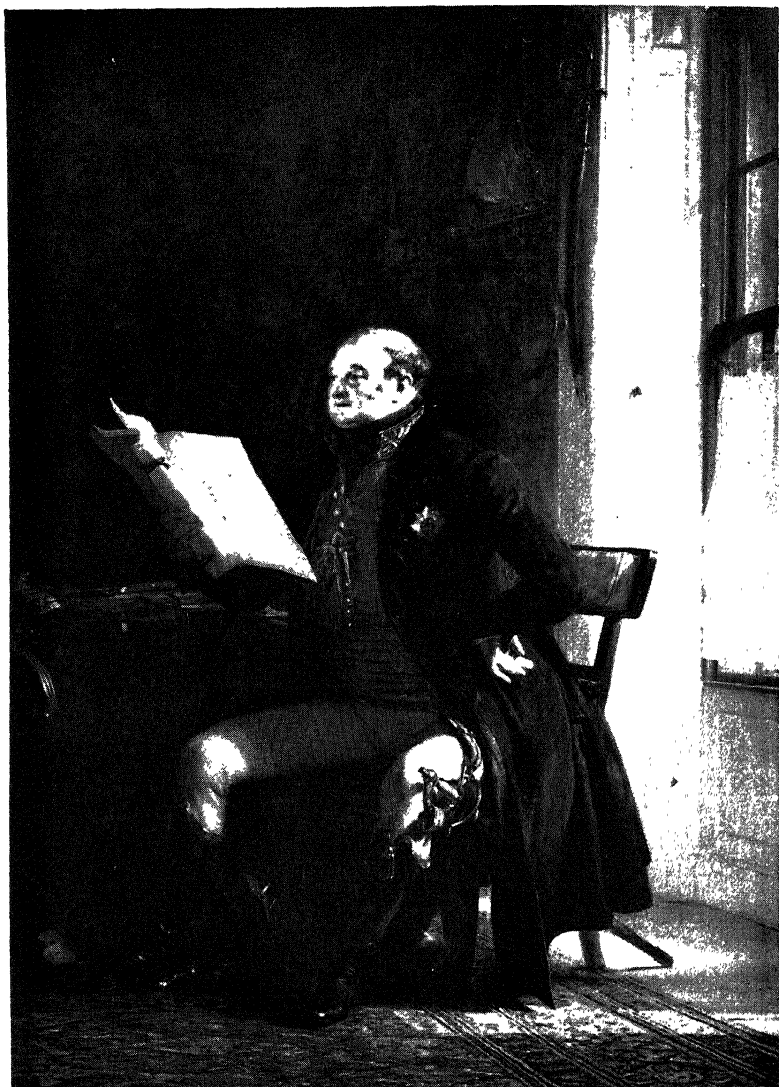


Tommy Garth in 1839  
( *Barraud* )



The Duke of Cumberland about 1815 as Colonel of the 15th Hussars,  
painted in profile to conceal the scars of war

.. (*Artist Unknown*)



The Duke of York, Sophia's best friend and Tommy Garth's kindly uncle  
(*Wilkie*)



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to lose in the end, and had, and could have, no say in the decisions which were so important in their lives.

For them there was only the nightmarish behaviour of the father who had until then represented to them kindness and security. The 'hysteric fit' was only one of a series of incidents which involved them. Once he started up in the middle of a service, embraced them and the Queen, and burst into tears. He was continually demanding their presence (for his affection for his daughters, at least, never altered, though it now had a frenzied and frightening quality) and they had to go to him. Not only was the King demented and raving, and not only did those ravings consist largely of references to his romantic fixation on his 'Eliza', but they were also highly indecent. None the less, there were many ready to inveigh against what they considered the cruelty of keeping the six daughters from their father—among them, surprisingly, their chief governess, Lady Charlotte Finch—and the princesses were sacrificed.

\* \* \*

November 3rd, 1788, was Sophia's eleventh birthday.

By then the King, who slept hardly at all, and complained bitterly of it, had grown much weaker. He wandered about the corridors with a stick, accosting his frightened family and attendants, and calling himself an old man; but he still leapt on his horse and careered wildly about the courtyard, and he still went out hunting. The doctors took to drastic measures, dosing him heavily with quinine and soporifics, and (the very night before the birthday) blistering his shaven head in an effort to draw the noxious substances which they believed to be poisoning the brain outwards to the skin.

On the day itself some tremendous effort was obviously made by all concerned that everything should seem as normal as possible.

'On these occasions', says Mrs. Papendiek, Keeper of the Wardrobe and Reader to the Queen, whose husband was a page and nursed the mad King, 'the princesses always had some amusement as a holiday, and were more than usual among the family. This day they were all to dine together for the King to see his children.'

So in came the King, his wig balanced on his head to hide the scars of the blistering, his eyes, as the Queen said to Fanny Burney, like nothing so much as black-currant jelly, the veins in his face swollen and his voice hoarse and dreadful. But something was clearly amiss. 'He took little notice of them or of any-one. At dessert he fell into a heavy doze.'

The precautions against an outbreak from him had evidently been taken too far. The King had probably been drugged to ensure a quiet birthday party.

'They all left him,' Mrs. Papendiek went on, 'and Dr. Baker entered. On waking up His Majesty inquired what it all meant.'

They tried to pass it off—perhaps the table covered with anniversary luxuries, the full complement of chairs for a party, now left empty and abandoned about him, had puzzled the waking King—by telling him that the Queen was ill and had been sent to rest, and begged him to leave her in peace, 'but the manoeuvre was not successful, and the poor King became rapidly worse'.

It was a birthday which Sophia at least would never forget.

Two days later came the climax—introduced in Fanny Burney's diary with the words, 'Oh, dreadful day!'

That day began badly, with a notice in the *Morning Herald* which made (though guardedly enough) the first reference in print to 'some slight derangements' in the King's health. The Queen was upset and angry, and ordered Fanny Burney to burn her copy of the paper. The Prince of Wales, just arrived from Brighton, wrote off to his friend Richard Brinsley Sheridan, asking him to 'in person and tonight, go round, however late, and in my name, declare to the editor of every paper that if they dare ever to insinuate even the most distant account of His Majesty's health, unless authorized to do so, I will prosecute with the utmost severity'.

It was that afternoon, at dinner, at which the whole family, including the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York were present, that the King burst out into a fit of maniacal excitement, ending by seizing his eldest son by the collar and pinning him against the wall. The prince burst into tears, and had to have his temples bathed with Hungary water by his sisters. The Queen fell into violent hysterics, rushed to her room and fainted.

She was pursued by the King, who did not understand her flight, and was concerned about her. He would not leave her,

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kept her from her bed until midnight, refused to sleep in his own room, had a cot put up in her bedroom, and wandered in and out with a lighted candle, pulling back the bed-curtains and peering in at her all night. The terrified Queen kept Miss Goldsworthy sitting up by her as a protection, but even her presence did not stop the half-hour-long, raving, pacing visits, and when the King eventually left his wife he slammed her door behind him and locked it. Upon this the Queen summoned Dr. Baker but he, always ineffectual, and sometimes contemptibly craven, 'excused himself, saying he was in so violent a perspiration he could not rise with safety'.

No one, it seems, except Miss Goldsworthy, was prepared to protect the Queen from her husband's attentions, which put her in a state of panic, though the two princes did sit up all night fully dressed, even to their decorations, with the doctors and the gentlemen-in-waiting in the room next the King. Miss Burney, awake in her room, shivered and shook. Not an eye, she believed, was closed 'in the house' all night.

It is at this stage that we reach the tableau of wretched despair mentioned in the last chapter.

'The condition of the Queen', to quote Mrs. Papendiek's own words, 'was pitiable in the extreme. The first few days of her terrible grief she passed almost entirely with her hands and arms stretched across a table before her, with her head resting upon them, and she took nothing to eat or drink except once or twice a little barley water.'

She had given way completely, giving no thought to her appearance, weeping when the princesses asked to see her, and declaring she could neither see them nor pray while in her dreadful situation, in which she expected every moment to be broken in on by the King, and never knew what he might not do next.

' "What will become of me! What will become of me!" rang out her deep and piercing lamentation.'

Then she sent for all the princesses, including even the five-year-old Amelia, was 'wholly overcome', and wept 'even aloud'. That night the drama of the day before was repeated, with variations.

Once again the ominous glittering tableau of the night before was presented in the silent room next the King's—and this time Miss Burney peeped in, to find the room next the unconscious

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King's 'quite filled with gentlemen and attendants, arranged round it on chairs and sofas, in dead silence', and to recognize the princes 'by their stars'.

She was not there when the sleepless King wandered in at one o'clock in his nightshirt, and, in surprise and consternation, demanded what they were all doing there—then he made straight for his favourite son, the renegade Duke of York, who had abandoned him for his brother, burst into tears, and piteously cried out to him, 'Oh, my boy! I wish to God I might die, for I am going to be mad!'

The gentlemen silently urged Dr. Baker to lead his patient back to bed. This time that doctor had no excuse ready, and nerved himself to approach him.

His timorousness was justified in the event. The King, who was a very strong man, even at fifty, promptly seized him, and attempted to choke the life from him. While he held him by his throat helpless against the wall, and pinned into a corner, he berated him for being a fool, an old woman, and a quack.

The Prince of Wales, perhaps feeling that he had already had his fill of danger, did not come forward, but signed and whispered to others to do so. His father, a man of cool courage, had once said that all his sons were brave except one, 'and him I will not name, for he is to succeed me'.

For some time no one in the room showed any anxiety to obey: which gives us some idea of how terrible the King's frenzy must have been. At last the Queen's Vice Chamberlain, Colonel Stephen Digby, who was no longer a young man, summoned courage to thrust himself between the King and his half-strangled victim. Catching hold of the King's arm, he tried to drag him away, beseeching him to leave go. The King merely planted his feet more strongly and widely apart, and demanded to be told who had seized him so roughly.

'I am Colonel Digby, Sir,' said the Vice-Chamberlain quietly, 'and your Majesty has been very good to me often; and I am going to be very good to you, for you must come to bed, Sir, it is necessary to your life.'

Whereupon the King, meekly giving way to kindness and firmness, where violence and fear had signally failed, went back to bed.

\* \* \*

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Even before this the Prince of Wales had taken matters into his own hands. Disgusted with Dr. Baker's weakness, he had sent for his own physician, Dr. Richard Warren. The King had refused to see a Whig with a large Whig practice, but Dr. Warren had heard enough by eavesdropping on the patient to allow him to pronounce the King mad, and in no equivocal terms. Further, he said he believed him to be incurable, and likely to die at any time.

'The King's life is in danger,' he declared. 'The seizures upon his brain are so violent that if he lives his intellect will not be restored.'

There was no likelihood of that, however, according to Warren. He said that he would 'answer for his never living to be declared a lunatic'.

The Queen, sunk in apathetic despair, no longer sought to keep any control in her own hands, abandoning authority to her son. She took to living in two rooms, shut in with her daughters, who were not even allowed out for a little exercise and fresh air. They were dragged out only for an occasional bruising experiment. Once they were induced to promenade in the garden in full view of their father. He was greatly excited, ran to the screwed-down windows, and tried to break them and get to his daughters. When he found that he could not do so, he called and screamed until Princess Elizabeth almost fainted, and 'all of them seemed more dead than alive when they got in the house'.

The pregnant stillness noted by Fanny Burney at the beginning grew heavier yet. The bickering doctors who were called in in increasing numbers (new ones appeared at the rate of two a week at this time) agreed on one thing only, that there must be absolute quiet. No callers were allowed at the Castle, and no one was permitted to leave its grounds. Indoors everyone crept about on tip-toe, and the bells which had sounded so frequently in the past were silenced. The park gates were locked, and strangers were not permitted through them for any purpose whatever. Changes of the guard were made so silently they seemed in dumb show.

The noisy King in the midst of all this silence, more and more solitary as his Queen, the princesses, and even the gentlemen of the household were banished from him, grew worse and worse.

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His maniacal attacks lasted for hours at a time, and soon it took four men to hold him down. Never forgetting that he was a king, however unkingly his behaviour, he bitterly resented their insolence, and often tried to kill or injure those who manhandled him. At other times he begged them piteously to dispatch him.

His insomnia increased until once he went sleepless for as long as twenty-nine hours. The endless raucous loquacity (when he spoke till the foam ran out of his mouth, but was unable to stop), the spasmodic twitchings and jerking, the bouts of depression, the worse ones of hilarity, the curious unlikely obsessions, the transparent craftiness, the pitiable moments of shrewdness and even of sanity when he recognized his state, alternated as each dreadful day succeeded the last.

Out of the crazy ravings his jackdaw observers carried away a few pieces of seeming wisdom, paradox or epigrammatic good sense, which today bring strikingly to us the pathos of the drama then being enacted at Windsor.

The King complained that Dr. Baker had told him a lie, ‘A white lie, he says, but I hate a white lie. If you will tell me a lie, let it be a black lie!’

At another time he exclaimed that womanhood was safe—the Prince of Wales was dead.

To one of his doctors, who had been a clergyman, and sought to excuse his change of profession by saying that our Saviour himself went about healing the sick, George III replied, ‘Yes, but he did not get £700 a year for it!’

And, of course, there was the occasion, so poignantly apposite, when he had *King Lear* smuggled in to him, and commented that he had no Regan and no Goneril, but only three Cordelias.

Windsor was too public, too far from London. At the end of November, despite the Queen’s protests (for she knew that with the bodily removal of the King to another establishment the battle to pretend that all was still well was lost) he was removed to Kew. There he could be privately exercised out of doors, there the ministers could reach him easily and often—to say nothing of the doctors, whose fees were growing very large.

In the end the King, infinitely troublesome, went only under threats, and exacted a promise that he would see the Queen on his arrival. The promise was broken, and the betrayal deeply resented.

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None the less, the Queen was there: the Queen and all the princesses.

They were to be spared nothing. Within a fortnight Mary and Amelia were the victims of another futile experiment. They were held up to a window so that their father could see them—this time the princesses were indoors, and he in the garden—but ‘when he had fixed his eyes upon them, he pulled off his hat, which in his agitation he flung one way, his gloves and cane another, and ran into the house. He burst into tears, which however did not last.’

Next day Amelia, the child of five, was taken in to see him in person. We do not know what transpired. The monarch who was capable of vicious attacks on his attendants, of burning wigs, and plotting to throw strong liniment in an equerry’s eyes, who seriously injured a page who dared to strike him, might reasonably be considered a frightening companion for a little girl.

Dr. Willis enjoyed a reputation for kindness to the aristocratic insane he cared for in his private madhouse, but it was he who brought with him the strait-waistcoat and the ‘Coronation Chair’ of restraint, of which the King was always so afraid. Once the King was kept in the waistcoat (and with his legs bound) for seven hours. In the monstrous immovable chair, fixed to its own base and plentifully provided with straps, he spent the greater part of many long days.

No wonder if the princesses, small and large, retained vivid memories of the madman who was their father.

On February 17th, 1789, a Public Bulletin announced to the nation that he was well again. The nightmare was over—for him.

For them it would never be over. They were to live with the memory of it and the fear of its recurrence always.

## CHAPTER 9

### *'Happy and Glorious'*

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**T**he main lesson which those who wished the King well brought out of his collapse was that he was never in future to be crossed.

If he were, they believed, it might bring on another bout of insanity, and the next time there might be no recovery. Their fortunes, political and personal, depended on keeping the King sane, and therefore, for their own sakes as well as his, he must at all costs be kept free from worry.

At first the doctors' diagnoses and treatments did not seem to be leading in this direction. Attempts to bring on an attack of gout, blistering to draw out poisons, immense doses of purgatives alternated with laudanum, or the application of 'carded wool and bootikins of woollen yarn to His Majesty's feet', pointed rather to suspected physical causes.

However, Dr. Willis did tell a committee of the House of Lords that 'If it was any common person I should scarce doubt of his recovery', which seemed to indicate an awareness of the additional strain a monarch had to bear. Also, when questioned as to the cause of the outbreak, though he hazarded that it had 'been brought about by using very strong exercise, taking little sustenance, watching or want of sleep', he added the significant words, 'perhaps when his mind was upon the stretch with very weighty affairs'.

Then, too, the physicians had listened outside the door of the King's room at Windsor 'to see if they could gain a clue to any subject that might be especially worrying to the King's mind'.

Once the doctors began to think along those lines they would have plenty of corroborative material from the patient's ravings.

'He spoke', records Fanny Burney, 'of the general conduct of the Prince of Wales, fearing that his brothers, with the exception of Adolphus, were following him; of his little Octavius who



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had been his companion, his comfort, his delight, adding that the Almighty had taken him. He hoped that he was resigned to His will, but he must be very sinful to be so sorely chastened; and then the tears rolled down his cheeks in a manner pitiful to behold.’

It may well be that the doctors, the ministers and the family, while believing that the King’s troubles were the cause of his breakdown, did not care to express that opinion too frankly in public.

The King had had worries in plenty when sane, perhaps the most painful being family ones. In the nine years since the sunlit scene recorded by West, the picture of a happy and united family had changed much. In time the situation would worsen until the humane physician, Bland Burgess, could write as follows:

‘I do not believe there is a more unhappy family in the whole kingdom than that of our good King. They have lately passed whole hours together in tears, and often they do not meet for half a day, but each remains alone, separately brooding over their misfortunes. The ill-success and disgraces of the Duke of York, the wounds or ill-health of the princes Ernest and Augustus, and the strange caprices and obstinacy of the Prince of Wales—all these causes are perpetually preying on them and making them miserable. The King sometimes bursts into tears, rises up and walks about the room, then kisses his daughters and thanks God for having given them to him, by which the princesses are variously agitated, and sometimes so much so as to go into fits.’

The caprices of the Prince of Wales had included an affair with an actress which had cost the King £5,000; low life in the company of his disgraceful uncles and aunts, the Cumberlands and Gloucesters; defection to the Whig party and hero-worship of the King’s arch-enemy, Charles James Fox; and recurring crises of debts running into hundreds of thousands of pounds. By 1785, too, he had secretly ‘married’ the Roman Catholic widow, Maria Fitzherbert.

An even bitterer blow than Prinny’s secession was the defection of Frederick, the favourite second son and Duke of York. The King, fearing Prinny’s influence on his brother, had sent Frederick to Germany the year after the West picture was painted. Frederick, however, had returned in August 1787, a fit

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companion for Prinny the Bacchus, a seasoned gambler, and, to quote Mirabeau's description of him, '*puissant chasseur, puissant buveur, rieur infatigable, sans grace, sans contenance, sans politesse*'.

By the end of the year York had ceased to visit Windsor, and Prinny and he outvied each other in extravagance, debauchery and degrading escapades. The King was broken-hearted.

As if the loss of these two sons were not enough, even the jolly sailor, William, had cut adrift and joined his brothers. He too gave constant cause for anxiety for his insubordination as a naval officer and his impulsiveness as a lover, all the more so as his romantic intentions were always honourable. His escapades reached their climax in January 1788, with the King's once again trying to extricate him from an unsuitable amour by packing him off to yet another corner of the globe.

No wonder, with three such sons, that the King began to show signs of serious strain that spring. He must have begun to realize that he had lost his three eldest sons for ever.

He had also lost two other sons, and in a far more grievous way.

Alfred, his youngest son, born the year after the picture was painted, had died at the age of two.

The King had suffered, but he had recognized that he might have been worse afflicted. 'Had it been Octavius,' he said, terribly, 'I should have died too.'

In less than nine months Octavius was dead. He was four. He had been inoculated, with his sister Sophia, and sent to Kew to recuperate.

Sophia did well. However, 'just when the eruption should have come out', Mrs. Papendiek tells us, the King had taken his baby son into the gardens late in the evening, towards sunset. Twenty-four hours later the little boy was dead, 'apparently from suffocation which nothing could relieve'.

Perhaps the King felt himself to blame. Inoculation was new, and generally distrusted. His grief was uncontrollable, and life-long.

It was three months after the death of Octavius, in 1788, that the fifteenth and youngest child, a daughter, Amelia, had been born. To her the King seemed in large measure to transfer his love for the dead Octavius, but she never erased the memory of his most beloved child.

There were other obsessions besides the misdoings of his

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elder sons and the loss of his younger ones which troubled the King during his madness. 'I that am born a gentleman', he said to his Lord Chancellor Thurlow, 'shall never lay my head on my last pillow in peace and quiet as long as I remember my American colonies.' Throughout his feverish wanderings he harked back to their loss, expressing the shame and regret which he had somewhat succeeded in repressing when well.

A lesser political matter also troubled the King. He did not care for the impeachment proceedings which had been begun in 1787 against Warren Hastings, and which were to last for seven years. To George this was a Whig persecution.

Certain other obsessions, again, plagued the King in his madness. Queen Charlotte's resentment was not only for a poor mad king, but for a husband who (however irresponsibly) insulted her daily before all men. His obsession with his 'Eliza' grew ever greater, he spoke of her constantly, scribbled love notes, and made her valuable gifts, such as an estate at Langley Park. He repeatedly bellowed forth a bawdy song, clearly having her in mind.

*'I made love to Kate,  
Long I sighed for she,  
Till I heard of late  
That she'd a mind for me!'*

He was King Ahasuerus, he said, and she was Queen Esther.

All this was bad enough. But not only was the King Ahasuerus and Lady Pembroke Esther, but the Queen was given the part of Vashti. The doctors always assured the King that she was kept away from him on their orders, but he persisted in believing that, like the Queen in the Book of Esther, she had wilfully refused to come to him—and perhaps, in fact, there was something in it, for the Queen was very frightened of him.

George III, at any rate, was not content to admire his 'Eliza', he wished to rid himself of Charlotte. He himself reported, according to the doctors, that he had told her about Christmas time 'that he did not like her, that he preferred another, that she was mad, and had been so these three years, that he would not on any account admit her to his bed till the year 1793 for reasons then improperly explained and such like extravagant and wild conversation'.

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The King was usually violent after Charlotte's visits. He maintained that her children were afraid of her and her bad temper; and that though the law said a man should have only one wife nature allowed more. He referred to her as the late Queen of Great Britain, constantly annulled all marriages, and lived in a world where everyone he liked was seventeen, and only those he disliked were dead. He plotted and planned to escape to 'Eliza'.

One of the most interesting features of George III's attacks of insanity is that the same delusions occurred in them all. A quarter of a century after his 1788 attack he was living in the same unreal world of his youth and early romantic happiness, populated with his dead, he was married to Eliza and divorced from his Queen, there was a great flood inundating England and forcing him to flee to Denmark or Hanover ('some distant region'?), and he was still declaring his sons dead.

An abridged extract therefore, from the clinical notes of the last madness will give a fair picture of his obsessions in 1788, and is used here because so many of the obsessions are included.

- September 9 This morning too violent to receive the physicians.  
10 Shed tears of joy during interview of the physicians at an expectation he had of seeing Prince Octavius at Kew today.  
13 He had signed death Warrants for six of his sons.  
19 Detailed the effect of an Act of Parliament just passed, and read in all the Churches for the dissolution of all marriages before the first of August. Also his power of bringing people to life and making them young again.
- October 28 Proposing to escape to Denmark from an inundation over the country.  
31 Said one of the princes had been executed and he had only one son left.
- November 2 No sleep, in restraint all night.  
10 Gave Princess Amelia a minute account of her own funeral . . .  
16 Tears and laughter succeed one another.  
18 Gave a concert to his ladies, many long dead.  
24 At the name of Dr. John Willis got into a passion.

## ‘HAPPY AND GLORIOUS’

- December 2 Liberal in a power he possesses of sending people to lower world.
- 12 This morning in a violent burst of passion against Sir Henry Halford for not allowing that the Prince Regent had thrown overboard one of his sisters, and drowned his brother in a passage to France.
- 29 Talked all day German and English.

In view of all this one can hardly blame those about the King for connecting his insanity with worrying subjects, though they may quite well have been incorrect in doing so.

The doctors accepted a connection. When he recovered Willis pleaded with the King not to resume his duties too soon.

The King himself accepted the explanation. Almost immediately after his recovery, when his two eldest sons were clamouring to plead their cases before him, he told the Queen to inform them that ‘I propose avoiding all dissensions that may in their nature agitate me.’

Again, on recovering from the 1801 attack, he sent a reproachful message to Pitt: ‘Tell him I am now quite well—quite recovered from my illness; but what has he not to answer for who is the cause of my having been ill at all?’

The ministers accepted the connection. When Dr. Willis gave the King’s message to Pitt, Pitt sent the King his solemn promise that he would never again, whether in or out of office, agitate the Catholic question which had precipitated the attack.

That evening Dr. Willis wrote to Pitt:

‘I stated to him what you wished, and what I had a good opportunity of doing; and, often saying the kindest things of you, he exclaimed, “Now my mind will be at ease!” Upon the Queen’s coming in the first thing he told her was your message, and he made the same observation about it.’

\* \* \*

It is natural to wonder what psychiatrists today think of the madness of George III, and whether their diagnoses and treatment would be very different from those of the eighteenth-century physicians.

## ‘HAPPY AND GLORIOUS’

It is at once comforting and disturbing to realize that, though our attitude to the victims of insanity has improved, our knowledge of the disease has grown hardly at all. Excessive use of purges, blistering, the strait-jacket and the chair of restraint apart, the King received probably much the same treatment as he would do today. There are some distinguished psychiatrists who consider electrical shock treatment, the main departure today, at least as unsatisfactory and as dangerous as the blisters and purges of the eighteenth century. For the rest, the patient would be calmed by removing him from the emotional turmoil created in his family, regulating his sleep, keeping up his nourishment, soothing him with hydrotherapy and drugs, occupying him with simple tasks, and reassuring him by frequent talks with his doctors.

Would today's psychiatrists come to very different conclusions as to the causes of the outbreak? One, at least, would not. Dr. Manfred Güttmacher, the American psychiatrist who devoted many years to the study of the King's madness, writes of the 1788 attack:

‘One can only speculate about what had caused George III to become definitely psychotic in 1788. The illness came at a period of political calm. Five years before he had weathered the loss of the American colonies, and had even accepted the coalition ministry without serious effects. Surely the Hastings trial and the other relatively petty political issues of 1788 were not of sufficient moment to produce such a storm?’

‘It is my view that mere responsibility and adversity could not produce a psychosis in George III. His balance was upset by serious inner emotional conflicts. It is general psychiatric knowledge that mental strain is not proportional to the apparent importance of environmental factors, but depends upon the subtle specific response that they evoke. Only rarely is one isolated circumstance the cause of a mental disorder.’

‘Attacks of manic-depressive insanity are generally the resultant response, in a vulnerable individual, to a constellation of events. The balance is finally tipped.’

‘The failure of the Prince of Wales to mend his ways after his reconciliation with his father, and his inciting the Duke of York and Prince William to join with him in rebellion were undoubtedly of great importance in producing the psychosis. The

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subject was frequently alluded to in the patient's psychotic utterances. Psychologically it may well have been associated with the revolt of the fractious American colonies, and it may have been responsible for causing that topic to figure so prominently during the illness. George III feared that, like the colonies, his thirteen children would revolt and break away from him one by one.

'From the nature of George III's utterances about Lady Pembroke during his illness, it seems likely that the psychosis resulted partly from his emotional relationship with her. The delusion in which the simple wish-fulfilment mechanism is clearly intelligible—the belief that all marriages had been annulled—is significant. George III had admired Lady Pembroke for many years, even before her marriage. Queen Charlotte had finished bearing him fifteen children; no doubt he held her largely responsible for the fact that they were beginning to turn out badly. The Queen was far from beautiful, Lady Pembroke had preserved her rare beauty remarkably. During the first part of 1788 the King must suddenly have realized that he was again greatly attracted to her.

'Immediately an inward conflict arose. He loved her; he wanted her as his Queen. That was obviously impossible. He must be satisfied with being her lover. No, that could not be! He must be a King—his mother had told him that; he was the head of the Church, as well as of the State. That would be acting like his libertine son, the Prince of Wales, whose philandering proclivities he had despised and berated. Moreover, it would hardly be the type of loyalty that Queen Charlotte deserved. George III could not tolerate disloyalty in any one, least of all in himself. He could no longer stand the constant conflict between his rigid conscience and his psycho-sexual desires. Insanity appears to have been the only way out for him.

'So conscientious and honest an individual was George III that he could not, when well, comfortably dodge reality. He had none of that facility for postponing and evading issues that more unprincipled men possess. Whenever the necessity developed of compromising with what he considered absolute truth, he suffered painfully. Men of his type in public office are constantly tormented and harassed.

'This rigid, scrupulous psychological constitution was chiefly

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responsible for George's attacks of mental disorder. Had he been able to delegate unpleasant tasks to his subordinates, leave difficult decisions for others to make, or adopt a "come what may" attitude and do the best he could with a problem, he would not have become insane.'

Other psychiatrists today disassociate themselves from Dr. Güttmacher's conclusions. They believe that the King's insanity was evidence of general medical inferiority, and point to the great incidence of mental deficiency and even actual lunacy in the family for supporting evidence. To them it seems that King George III was always, all his life, mad in various degrees, and that periodically his madness increased so noticeably that he had to be removed from circulation. They believe that, whether he had had great worries or not, he would have had these periodic outbreaks. Even they, however, seem to agree that a particular shock or grief, such as the death of a beloved child, might precipitate such an attack.

We can therefore, I believe, conclude that if King George III had lived in this century instead of in his own the advice and treatment he would have received would have been little different. More relevant to the subject of my argument, the six princesses, his daughters, would today, incredible as it seems, have been faced with much the same intolerable situation as the one in which they found themselves in the year 1789.

It can be maintained that fears of precipitating attacks of insanity in the King retarded social reform in England for thirty years and more.

What wonder, then, if the private happiness of six loving, obedient and overdominated princesses did not weigh very heavily in the scales?

That this was so I hope to make clear in the following chapters, in which I have attempted to set down as briefly as possible the 'romantic' histories of each of the daughters of King George III.



PART IV

*Love and the Princesses*



## CHAPTER 10

### *Royal*

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**T**he first princess was Charlotte Augusta Matilda, Princess Royal, known as Royal.

About the time of that memorable eleventh birthday of Princess Sophia's, George III had made a significant confession to his two eldest daughters, by then young women. He had told them that he felt guilty because he had not arranged marriages for them. He said that the reason was the pain which the thought of their ever leaving him gave him. Obviously repentant, however, for what he felt in his heart to be a wrong he had done them, he promised that if he recovered he would go to Hanover in the summer, and would make his court there as gay as he could so that young German princes would come to it.

The Princess Royal was already twenty-two years old in November 1788, and her sister Augusta only two years younger. Even the third princess, Elizabeth, was no longer a child, for she was eighteen. In those days of early marriages they must themselves have begun to wonder whether their lives would long continue loveless. Perhaps they had even begun to realize that they were virtually prisoners, the victims of a father who not only distrusted any thought of 'romance' for his family, associating it with unsuitable matches, or worse; but who, moreover, clung to his sons and daughters with an abnormal and almost frightening possessiveness.

The King's efforts to grapple his sons to him, by constraint when affection failed, had proved disastrous. The young rebels, as obstinate as their sire, had soon bounded beyond his control.

However, his daughters, as he must have known, were completely in his power. Only their marriages could take them away from his side, and those he seemed determined to prevent at all costs.

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The King's dislike of even the thought of his daughters marrying went far beyond ordinary fatherly affection. He was said to have 'positively howled' whenever the subject was mentioned.

Unhappily for the princesses, the Queen never took issue with him on the matter. Seventeen years after his shamefaced confession during his dementia to the two eldest girls she wrote to him in terms which revealed how much more concerned she was with his peace of mind than with her daughters' happiness. Her brother, the Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, was proposing to put forward his eldest son as a suitor for one of the younger princesses, and Charlotte wrote to the King:

'I have never named the subject to any of the princesses, for I have made it a rule to avoid a subject in which I know their opinions differ with [*sic*] your Majesty's, for every one of them have at different times assured me that, happy as they are, they should like to settle, if they could, and I feel I cannot blame them.'

In 1788 those long, long years of waiting—and these princesses had the same passionate blood in the veins as their brothers, we might remember—had already begun. Already, unknown to them, several suitors had presented themselves and been rejected. As early as 1781, when the Princess Royal was only fifteen, the Duchess of Chandos had tried to arrange an alliance for her with the Emperor of Austria, without success.

It would have been wise to have married off the Princess Royal during those fresh, buxom years between fifteen and twenty-one, for all the princesses, if not strictly beauties, were 'fine girls' in these blooming years, with golden hair, china-blue eyes and pretty pink and white complexions. Girlhood once past, they quickly coarsened, hardened, and grew fat and flabby. The princesses, unlike their father and mother, could never resist a good tuck in; perhaps after the scanty board at home good food and plenty of it was irresistible.

Transitory glories apart, the Princess Royal was a plain (Lady Mary Coke found her 'very plain') and clumsy girl. Not only was her taste in clothes really bad, and positively so, but she was careless and slovenly about putting them on. Then, she had no talents to compensate for these faults—she listened to music, in which most of the family took an interest, 'almost with pain', as even Fanny Burney admitted. Unhappily, too, she was

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intensely nervous and very shy, while having a keen sense of her own importance. Such a combination meant that she was considered cold, proud and sharp. Those who felt slighted by her unfortunate manner were not slow to avenge themselves by mocking at her public gaucheries. Poor stumbling, galumphing Royal could not lose a shoe at a ball without some wretched versifier making copy out of it and parodying a nursery rhyme, all to be bellowed out to music.

*As down the dance  
With heels from France  
A royal couple flew,  
Tho' well she tripped  
The lady slipped,  
Doodle, doodle, doo.  
The Princess lost her shoe,  
Her highness hopp'd,  
The fiddlers stopped  
Not knowing what to do,  
Doodle, doodle, doo—etc.*

Her critics did her less than justice, as her friend Mrs. Harcourt pointed out.

'Princess Royal has excessive sensibility,' she wrote, 'a great sense of injury, a great sense of her own situation, much timidity. Without wanting resolution, she wants presence of mind, from the extreme quickness of her feelings, which show themselves in her perpetual blushes. She has excellent judgment, wonderful memory, and great application. She is unjustly considered proud, and a peculiarity in her temper is mistaken for less sweetness than it deserves.'

Mrs. Papendiek too put down her awkwardnesses and ineptitudes to shyness, and a paralysing nervousness of her mother, pointing out that 'out of the Queen's presence she was a different being'.

It is true that like all her sisters, as the King in his madness said with anguish, Royal feared and disliked Queen Charlotte, and that this had a crippling effect on her. Soon she would nerve herself to set herself against her mother, and even to go so far as to say, not only that she 'never liked the Queen', but that she was 'a silly woman'.

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Fanny Burney often caught sight of the truth through the heavy rose-coloured veils of adulation which she determinedly held up between herself and the royal family. It was she who put her finger on the root cause of the Princess Royal's unhappy temperament.

'She is born to preside,' she said, 'and that with equal softness and dignity; but she was here in utter subjection, for which she had neither spirits nor inclination . . . her style of life was not adapted to the royalty of her nature, any more than of her birth.'

All descriptions of Royal combine to present us with a good-natured and not unintelligent girl, with some solid, unpretentious virtues, very proud, very sat upon, and finding it all a great strain.

She was painstaking, spelled well, spoke French and German, and wrote a pretty copperplate hand. So it was natural, when the doctors advised the Queen to devote all her time to her husband after his attack, and to give up teaching her children, that she would hand over to Royal. Her daughter must have already been doing some teaching at the time of that illness, for during it the King inscribed a book to her as 'governess to her three younger sisters'. She was still teaching them eight years later.

So we can imagine the Princess Royal, the 'first virgin in England' in a way in which Lady Sarah Lennox never had been, strangely doomed to pass her days in a schoolroom, and giving vent to jittery outbursts at the harsh domination of her parents, as she languished for a kingdom of her own where she might be a queen in fact if not in name.

Once she said that her life had been 'spent in a cloister rather than in a kingdom'. Even the formal levees and drawing-rooms and theatre visits, and the more friendly ones to Lord and Lady Harcourt at Nuneham, did not, it seems, add much gaiety to her existence. She probably hated them all, being no kind of social success. Or perhaps Cinderella finds any ball, however brilliant, but a dull affair without Prince Charming.

Not that Prince Charming was not seeking this Cinderella—or, shall we say, this ugly sister? If we frankly admit her lack of charm her story is only the more poignant, after all.

As time went on more and more suitors came forward for the two eldest daughters of the King of England. There were brave

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efforts to circumvent the King's determination to keep them on his side for ever. The Prince of Wales tried. His uncle (Prince Ernest of Mecklenburg-Strelitz) tried. Lady Harcourt tried. Her sister-in-law, Mrs. Harcourt, tried. Even that formidable dragon, the German attendant the Queen had brought to England with her, whom Fanny Burney called 'the stuffy old Schwellenburg', tried.

Among the suitors were: the Crown Prince of Denmark; Prince Ferdinand of Würtemberg; Prince Frederick of Orange; the Duke of Ostrogothland (brother of the King of Sweden); and a nephew of the King's, the son of his sister Augusta, Duchess of Brunswick. It was in 1791 that he was refused for the Princess Royal, the year in which she was twenty-five. This time it was the Queen, who detested his mother, her sister-in-law, who frustrated all plans on his behalf.

Nothing came of any of these attempts.

The King, so his brother the Duke of Gloucester said, made the excuse that he did not consider Continental alliances from a belief that his daughters would not wish to settle abroad. But he clearly had no intention of giving them to English bridegrooms either.

As the Princess Royal grew older and still remained unmarried she fell into a terrible state of despair. It was in 1794, her twenty-eighth year, that Bland Burges, the observant physician, wrote a horrifying description of her condition.

'She is naturally nervous, and susceptible of strong impressions. Convinced that she has no chance of ever altering her condition; afraid of receiving any impressions of tenderness or affection; reserved and studious; tenderly loving her brothers and feeling strongly every unpleasant circumstance attending them, she is fallen into a kind of quiet, desperate state, without hope and open to every fear, or in other words what is commonly called broken-hearted. This has operated strongly upon her health, and Sir Lucas Pepys, under whose care she is, expresses considerable apprehension for her, and even privately hints that he thinks she is in very great danger, as from her particular situation there is no chance of her being able to marry, which he pretty plainly says is the only probability he can foresee of saving her life or her understanding.'

Bland Burges, however, perceptive humanitarian as he was (in

later years he was to advocate the abolition of slavery, and the amelioration of the conditions of imprisonment for those more tangibly confined than the princesses) could not do anything to help Royal. It was her rakish elder brother, himself then very much in love with Mrs. Fitzherbert, who attempted rescue the next year. He was always generous and imaginatively kind to his adoring sisters.

Towards the end of 1795 he made an effort to marry off the Princess Royal to Peter Frederick Ludwig of Oldenburg, nephew and heir to the Duke, a widower for ten years past, and the father of several children.

The Princess Royal was delighted with the prospect, and wrote to her brother that 'could it be brought about it would be the properest situation'. Prinny, optimistic, urged his maternal uncle to bring Peter Frederick over to England, when he was '*sûr que dans bien peu de semaines tout serait conclu*'.

Everything seemed arranged. In August Princess Elizabeth was referring to her sister as the 'Dutchess [*sic*] of Oldenburg', and teasingly saying that 'her maiden-blush cheek is turned into a damask rose whenever the Duke's name is mentioned'.

Yet nothing came of this plan, either. Why not? Did the King once again simply refuse his consent? That, as he well knew, was all that was needed to crush all hopeful plots underfoot. If so, the Princess Royal's despair must have been blacker than before.

The Duke of Saxe Gotha, according to the Duke of Gloucester, fell in love with her when he was in England, 'his own wife being then supposed to be dying, in which case he could have undoubtedly married her; but, though [his wife was] afflicted with fits, there was no prospect of a vacancy'.

It would be callous to say of this story that the Princess Royal was never lucky.

Yet a miracle was to happen, and one which would occur only for this princess of all the six. Alone of the sisters she was to escape into marriage while her father was still in possession of his faculties, and with his assent, too. She was betrothed in her twenty-ninth year, and married when she was thirty.

This successful operation was largely due to the persistence and courage of the Harcourts, and the hard work of a certain Mr. Hippisley, who well earned the baronetcy which was his reward



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for acting as mediator and also commissioner and trustee of the marriage settlement.

This time the suitor was another widower, and one with young children. He was actually the brother of Peter of Oldenburg's dead wife. The offer was not particularly flattering to the Princess Royal personally, since negotiations had been opened for an alliance with her 'or one of the other princesses', and by no stretch of the imagination could the would-be groom be considered a romantic figure.

In point of size alone he was a quelling sight. Napoleon was to observe at no far-distant date that he believed God had created this prince to demonstrate the extent to which the human skin could be stretched without bursting. In England he was nicknamed, for obvious reasons, 'the Great Belly-gerent'.

There was a far greater hurdle to be overleaped, however, than the personal appearance of Frederick William Charles, Hereditary Prince of the Duchy of Würtemberg. There was an ugly scandal attached to his name. He was suspected of having murdered his first wife, who had been George III's own niece and the sister of the Princess Caroline whom Prinny was to marry and treat so shabbily.

This prince, while in the Russian service, had lived in St. Petersburg with his flighty wife. She had been foolish enough to have an affair with a man who had been the Empress's lover and was therefore still considered her property. Worse, she gave birth to a baby a year or two after she had ceased to live with her husband. He had left Russia, taking with him his children, but Catherine the Great had refused to let his wife go with them. She had instead turned her out of her home, and packed her off to a grim fortress on the Baltic, and soon the laconic news reached her family that she had died suddenly and had had to be buried at once and without ceremonials befitting her rank. Royal herself later said she never knew whether she had been poisoned by order of the Empress, or had died in child-bed.

In Europe unsavoury rumours were rife. Some believed that the prince had been involved in a planned murder, others that the wife had managed to escape to her Russian lover and was in hiding with him. Her own sister in England hoped so.

Small blame to King George III if he insisted that the matter be carefully looked into before he consented to the marriage of

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his eldest daughter with the husband of a niece, who, for all he knew, was still alive, and, if dead, might well have been murdered by him. The situation was complicated even more by the fact that the injured husband had chosen to keep his wife's infidelities from the knowledge of her mother, King George's own sister, the Duchess of Brunswick. He had a good deal to clear up.

The King, so the story goes, secure in his belief of Frederick William's guilt, or at any rate the impossibility of his proving his innocence, gave his provisional consent. The marriage would only take place if the suitor could clear his name; rather in the good old fairy-tale tradition, whereby the King sets suitors impossible tasks with the hand of a princess as guerdon. This task having been triumphantly performed against all expectations, King George III, always a man of his word, could not bring himself to go back on it.

Even so he did not give way at once, or easily. The Emperor of Russia urged the marriage, so did the Empress Catherine, and so even did the suitor's mother-in-law, George's sister. But the King sought refuge in delay. It was not until July 1796 that he gave the suitor a definite hint of hope.

Even when this reluctant consent had been shaken from him George resorted to some extraordinary delaying tactics, which revealed how intolerable he found the thought of meeting his daughter's future husband. The Hereditary Prince, eager to cross to England at last in December 1796, was put off on the excuse of bad weather. He did not land until the following April, after a very bad crossing, as it happened. Then he was kept at arm's length, asked to remain incognito, encouraged to take a tour throughout the country, and urged at all costs to keep away from London and the Court, where his bride awaited him.

Still, the King's feelings could not be spared for ever, and his message announcing the betrothal, and asking for a marriage portion for his daughter, went in due course to the House of Commons. Pitt granted a handsome £80,000, and the marriage treaty was signed.

It is worth noticing that this included a clause to the effect that the children of the marriage were to be brought up in Würtemberg but might not marry without the consent of the King of England or his successors.

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According to the Royal Marriages Act, and reasonably enough, the children of princesses who married into foreign families had been put beyond the King's domination. Then, at the first opportunity, he clutched to himself that extra power; and such was the delicate balance of his temper as to whether he would give permission or not for the planned espousal that the anxious pair doubtless thought it better not to dispute with him on lesser points. Even after all the preliminaries were agreed to, the King had offered to break off the marriage, taking on himself all responsibility.

There were to be, as it happened, no children. Royal's only child was stillborn, and the two sets of children's clothes (one for a boy and one for a girl, and meant to last for the first three years), which had formed part of the bridal trousseau, were never to be needed. Over thirty years later, on her death, they were, with a sad lack of sentiment, sold. She had never brought herself to part with them.

All that was in the future. The Princess Royal, still doubtless wondering whether this proposed marriage would come off or not, awaited her husband in a bad state of nerves. Always highly-strung, she was, according to Fanny Burney, passing on an eye-witness's account, 'almost dead with terror and agitation and affright at the first meeting. She could not utter a word. The Queen was obliged to speak her answers.'

However, the forty-year old widower, who had had experience of a far more difficult, sophisticated and complicated woman than Royal, knew how to manage his distraught bride-to-be. No doubt he was happy to find himself in command of the situation for a change, and he said very prettily that he hoped this first would be the last disturbance his presence would ever occasion her.

'She then tried to recover,' Fanny Burney wrote on, 'and so far conquered her tumult as to attempt joining in a general discourse from time to time . . . and the Princess Royal is quite revived in her spirits again, now this tremendous opening sight is over'.

The cartoonists had a Roman holiday. *They* did not gloss over the lack of youth and seductiveness in the bridegroom's—or, I am sorry to say, in the bride's—personal appearance. Gillray's famous cartoon, *Le Baiser a la Wurtemberg*, shows an

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ostentatiously be-uniformed, be-ribboned and be-medalled fiancé of preposterous proportions embracing an almost equally bulbous lady. His *The Bridal Night*, which was published on the day before the wedding, is even less delicate. The bridegroom is, again, covered with orders, Pitt the Prime Minister, holds a bag labelled £80,000, King George lights the couple to bed, and in a picture on the wall entitled *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* Cupid rides on an elephant.

Perhaps it was not a triumph of love with the poor Princess Royal; but it was certainly a triumph of good fortune against almost impossible odds.

In white satin, and with her hair in long ringlets, she went happily enough to the altar to meet a groom who was beautiful in her eyes, if in no one else's. He did his best to make himself so. Swathed in yards of shot silk further enriched with embroidery, and with gold and silver flaps and cuffs, he was (as the cartoonists had predicted) blazing with a special display of foreign orders and decorations.

For once Royal looked well, though for that the credit had to go to the Queen. Fanny Burney praised 'Her Royal Highness the bride' to her sister Augusta, and she 'confirmed the praise warmly, but laughingly added, "'Twas the Queen dressed her! You know what a figure she used to make of herself, with her odd manner of dressing herself; but Mamma said, 'Now really, Princess Royal, this one time is the last, and I cannot suffer you to make such a quiz of yourself: so I will really have you dressed properly.' And indeed the Queen was quite in the right, for everybody said she had never looked so well in her life." The word "quiz" you may depend was never the Queen's.'

After the wedding there was a most painful and embarrassing scene, with Royal and her father, drenched in tears, clinging tightly to each other. It was impossible to tear the King from her. Fitzgerald quotes a moving description.

'The princess hung upon her father's neck, overwhelmed with grief, and it was not until her consort urged her to close the painful scene that she could be prevailed upon to leave her father. The affectionate parent followed her to bid her farewell, but he was so overcome by the excess of his parental feelings that he could not give utterance to his words, and his streaming eyes looked the last blessing, which his lips would not pronounce.'



Gillray enjoys himself at the expense of poor Royal and her substantial bridegroom on their marriage—the only occasion on which King George III gave away a daughter

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The difficult parting achieved, however, off went the only one of George III's daughters to escape from his vigilance and his jealousy to love and marriage in Würtemberg. Every word of the bride's letters home, as her mother observed, 'bespoke inexpressible bliss', and she soon relaxed into the pleasant, cheerful, easy-going, mildly authoritative person she had always been meant to be. She never again gave a thought to clothes, and, it must be confessed, let herself go in other ways.

Nearly a quarter of a century later the same Princess Augusta who had laughed so merrily with Fanny Burney about 'Her Royal Highness the bride' paid a visit to her in Würtemberg and sent back to England a rather shocked account of what she looked like.

'I found my sister very much altered at first,' she wrote to Lady Harcourt, 'and had I not had the picture previous to seeing her, I should not have guessed it was her . . . She is very large and bulky. Her face is very broad and fat, which makes her features appear quite small and distended. But what strikes the most is, that from not wearing the least bit of corset, her stomach and hips are something quite extraordinary.'

Some of this obesity was due to dropsy, her mother's weakness, and some to the passing years, no doubt, but love of comfort, the old disregard for elegance, and indulgence in food in the company of a husband who had tables specially carved to accommodate his extensive paunch, had also played their parts.

Was it really a happy marriage? Royal's own family had divided opinions. Many people cordially disliked her husband, and felt pity for her. Napoleon called him a brute and said he ill-treated her. Castlereagh said he was a tyrant both in his public and private character.

His wife, at any rate, seemed well satisfied with him, and always insisted that she was happy. It is certain that she would never for a moment have exchanged her lot for that of any of her unmarried sisters. When Mary, nineteen years after her own wedding, achieved an even less romantic marriage, she wrote with obvious sincerity:

'The more I reflect on Mary's situation and mine, the more I regret my other sisters not having been equally fortunate; as I am convinced they would all have been happier had they been properly established; and they are so good and amiable in their

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various ways, that they would have been a blessing in every family.'

She was never to see her father again; or her mother either, for that matter. She was lost to them the day she sailed, and so the King's worst fears were confirmed.

Perhaps worse than his worst fears came about. Almost as soon as she had left home, as it must have seemed to him, the alarums and sudden flights before threats of Napoleon's approach began for her and her trembling husband. When the conqueror reached the little duchy he found that the corpulent duke was neither hero nor martyr. It is not certain whether the eldest daughter of the King of England followed enthusiastically in his assiduous wake, or whether she was acting an unsympathetic part—making '*bonne mine*', as she called it afterwards. If the latter, she played it so well as completely to deceive that suspicious and intelligent man. He considered that he had a '*bon accueil*', and said that she soon lost any prejudice against him, and that he 'was pleased with her'. She even worked successfully to bring about a marriage between his youngest brother, Jerome, and her own step-daughter Catherine, of whom she was fond.

Her income from the £80,000 dowry (about £5,000 a year, though she soon saw much less of it than that) continued to be sent to her faithfully from England despite the fact that she was quite cut off for nine years, and not allowed to correspond with her family. It was a situation that must have caused the affectionate King a lively anguish. What must he, who longed to fight Boney personally in single combat ('I'd give him a sound thrashing, I'm sure I should! I'm sure I should!') have thought of his craven son-in-law, as he saw him promoted for his complaisance, first from Duke to Elector, and then from Elector to King? If it is true that when his daughter was able to write home once more she babbled enthusiastically of Napoleon, and praised his bewitching smile, what must King George's reactions have been?

We do know that Queen Charlotte was offended by her daughter's daring to address her mother as one queen to another, '*Chère mère et sœur*.' The King decreed that the puppet Queen of Würtemberg (though she lived in a palace surmounted by an enormous gilt crown as if to prove her right to her new status)

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should never be addressed as such by the family, and even after this rule was relaxed Queen Charlotte never yielded the point. Her letters to her daughter had to be diverted to Prinny to be readdressed correctly. Charlotte Augusta would not greatly care. She had her kingdom, and she was actually a queen. No matter how tawdrily it had been obtained, she thoroughly enjoyed her tinsel crown.

George III would probably never forgive his son-in-law, even when, true to form, he deserted his master as soon as his support was really needed. This marriage, we can be sure, he would regard as having been a dreadful mistake. He would wish that he had never consented to it against his will. His resolution, never again to allow a daughter of his beyond the reach of his arm, would be hardened.



## CHAPTER 11

### *Poor Puss*

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**T**he second princess was Princess Augusta Sophia.

Princess Augusta, Prinny's 'poor Puss', never married. She was not so fortunate as the sister whom she once called 'a quiz'.

It was not that she was an unattractive girl. Ingenious artists have idealized her into something approaching beauty, and lesser ones, though less deceptive about a heavy nose and a solid outline, show her as lively and comely. Cherry lips, blue eyes, curling golden tresses, milk-white skin and swan-like neck—all were there, and fit for a prince. The long Guelph nose, the receding forehead and chin of her father were hardly remarkable in those early days. The time was yet to come when her niece, Princess Charlotte, could refer with the cruelty of extreme youth to Princess Augusta and her sister Elizabeth as 'a brace of very ugly daughters'.

It was not that there were not suitors, either. As the King made his half-demented admission of a guilty conscience to her and her elder sister, he was probably remembering that three years before, when she was just seventeen, he had rejected for her the hand of a very eligible wooer.

Augusta had a decided personality of her own. In company she was jolly, imperious, inquisitive and direct. She was a great admirer of boldness. There was, in fact, a good deal about her to remind one of her sailor-brother, William; and, oddly enough, she had a passion for the sea, and chose an anchor for her symbol. In private she was apt to be melancholy. She was keen on sports, and it is strange to realize that she played cricket, football and hockey with her brothers, and spoke of those early games with gusto to the end of her days. She was good at music. She was a tender lover of children, and must have wished for some of her own.

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Thanks once again to Fanny Burney, we have a picture of the young princess early in 1787 (nearly two years before the King's confession) when it was still possible to tease her with the name of the prince who had hoped to marry her.

The 'Mr. Turbulent' of this sprightly passage was Charles de Guiffardière, the Protestant French pastor and master at Windsor. He was either allowed more freedom than usual in that stuffy court, or, being French, took it. Fanny was much shocked at his temerity.

'The Princess Augusta came, during coffee, for a knotting shuttle of the Queen's. While she was speaking to me, he [Mr. Turbulent] stood behind and exclaimed, *à demi voix*, as if to himself, "*Comme elle est jolie ce soir, son Altesse Royale!*" And then seeing her blush extremely, he clasped his hands, in high pretended confusion, and hiding his head, called out "*Que ferai-je?*" The Princess has heard me!"

"Pray, Mr. Turbulent," cried she, hastily, "what play are you to read tonight?"

"You shall choose, ma'am, either *La Coquette corrigée*, or——" (he named another I have forgotten).

"Oh, no!" cried she, "that last is shocking! don't let me hear that!"

"I understand you, ma'am. You fix then, upon *La Coquette*? *La Coquette* is your Royal Highness's taste?"

Driven to desperate straits, the Princess declared to the Frenchman that she liked no French plays whatever.

"No, pray don't; for I like none of them!"

"None of them, ma'am?"

"No, none; —no *French plays* at all!"

And away she was running, with a droll air, that acknowledged she had said something to provoke him.

Mr. Turbulent then had the impudence to step adroitly between the Princess and the door, shut it with his back, stand barring her way and refuse to open it until she had explained herself. The Princess appealed to the ladies present to bear out her opinion that all French plays were just like each other, and that it was boring to hear them read every night. Mr. Turbulent, however, took a very nice revenge for this insult to his national drama. To quote from Fanny Burney again:

"Pray, then, madam," cried he, "if French plays have the

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misfortune to displease you, what *national* plays have the honour of your preference?"

"I saw he meant something that she understood better than me, for she blushed again, and called out, "Pray, open the door at once! I can stay no longer; do let me go, Mr. Turublent!"

"Not till you have answered that question, ma'am! What *country* has plays to your Royal Highness's taste?"

The Princess, though keeping her temper, was growing impatient, and perhaps a little angry, for she begged Fanny to 'take him away!—pull him'. Fanny refused, saying, 'Indeed, ma'am, I dare not undertake him! I cannot manage him at all!'

"The country, the country, Princess Augusta—name the happy country!" was all she could gain.

"Order him away, Miss Burney!" cried she. "'Tis your room—order him away from the door!"

"Name it, ma'am, name it!" exclaimed he; "name but the *chosen nation*!"

"And then, fixing her with the most provoking eyes, "Est-ce la Danemarck?" he cried.

"She coloured violently, and, quite angry with him, called out, "Mr. Turbulent, how can you be such a fool!"

And now, at last, Fanny Burney found that 'the Prince Royal of Denmark was in his meaning and in her understanding'.

The little scene has an added poignancy if we reflect that poor Augusta may have known by then that the suit, which had already dragged on for fifteen months, was in vain, and that she would not be permitted to marry the Prince of Denmark.

Why did King George III reject him? Leaving aside the personal prejudices we have already recognized, he may have had a good reason.

Lady Harcourt believed that his dread of insanity was an important factor in his decision.

'Of what really deserved that name,' she wrote, 'he had a greater horror than any person I have ever conversed with, and two [*sic*, three] years before his illness of 1788 he had declined giving one of his daughters to the Prince of Denmark on account of the King his father's situation; and I have known him almost express a wish for the death of persons for whom he has had regard, from the apprehension that such a dreadful calamity was inherent in the family.'

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King George would have known all too much about the Danish royal family and the unbalanced behaviour of some of its members. He was not likely to have forgotten the sufferings of his own younger sister, Caroline Matilda, at the hands of the cruel little imbecile, Christian VII, or her miserable death in a prison fortress. Even a man less touchy than that monarch on the subject of insanity, less fond of a dead sister, and less strongly attached to his daughter, might have paused before handing over the young Augusta to a prince from the Danish house.

The Prince of Denmark was not the only suitor rejected for Augusta, however.

Prince Frederick of Orange offered himself, too, for her hand or her elder sister's; and Prince Ferdinand of Würtemberg (a cadet member of the house into which Royal had married) arrived in person to woo her. At the time Mrs. Papendiek said she was 'the most beautiful creature one would wish to behold', and he won all hearts as he danced at the Queen's birthday ball.

The King, however, had no difficulty in resisting Prince Ferdinand's charms; he refused to consider the match for a moment. (Perhaps he had already had enough of Würtemberg.) The prince went home crestfallen.

It is an interesting footnote that, according to Mr. Speaker Abbott, Prinny had tried to have the Prince of Würtemberg married to Augusta, his favourite, and not Royal. As we know, it was all one to Frederick William, and the eldest princess was the logical choice. Still, one recalls the famous game of cards in *The Way of All Flesh*, when the Miss Allabys played in the eldest Miss Allaby's bedroom, with the unsuspecting Theodore Pontifex for stake. Royal and Augusta might well have played for 'the Great Belly-Gerent'. One might even feel that in their circumstances the conception is intrinsically less fantastic than Samuel Butler's.

The Prince of Wales probably consoled himself for his failure with the thought that there would be other suitors among whom to choose for Augusta. Neither he nor any one else probably realized that Würtemberg represented the one and only chance of escape for any of the princesses while their father had control over them, and that when Augusta lost her opportunity to be his bride she was doomed to spinsterhood for life.

Augusta herself certainly did not realize it. She always

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planned to marry. She had not lost hope at the age of twenty-five, when she wrote, confidently, and a little skittishly, to Prinny:

'I intend for the rest of my life to be very despotic till I have a lord and master, and then (unless I break the great oaths and promises I shall make when I marry), I shall give myself up to his whims.'

Eleven years later another serious attempt was made to obtain Augusta's hand in marriage. This time it was the old Landgrave of Hesse Homburg who was trying to arrange a match between her and his eldest son, and Augusta, as is to be seen in the Windsor Archives today, was flatteringly stipulated by name.

To this proposal the King of England did not deign to reply. George III could use silence like a weapon.

Fourteen years later, the same candidate, married and widowed since that earlier suit, was to offer himself once more as a wooer for an English princess's hand. The next time, however, he would be seeking, not Augusta, but her younger sister, Elizabeth, as a bride, and the next time his courtship, though stormier, would be successful.

Augusta probably never even knew that she had been paid the compliment of a proposal particularizing her, for the Queen chose to tell Elizabeth (who was the lucky one) that her fiancé had once before proposed for *one* of the sisters, and that the King had given no answer. It was tactful, of course; the Queen was always tactful.

As time went on Augusta's moments of quiet and sadness were noticed.

'Princess Augusta, soft and tender-hearted,' said Bland Burges, observant as always, 'vents her sorrow at her eyes, and cries till she becomes composed and resigned.'

William, who felt a natural sympathy with her, also noticed her reserve.

'She looks as if she knew more than she would say,' he once commented on seeing her again after a long absence overseas, 'and I like that character.'

In time Augusta was called upon more and more to be both sad and silent. Denied a marriage in her own station, and being by nature both warm-hearted and bold, she was bound to fall in love where she could, and to do something about it.

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These princesses were not naturally flighty. Their most raffish ancestors had shown a sort of hum-drum fidelity towards their mistresses. Even their brothers, even Prinny, treated their mistresses like wives, and married them whenever and however possible. The sisters, too, tended to settle down like domesticated doves with their husbands, roosting steadfastly with their chosen mates, or grieving in inconsolable misery at being deprived of them.

Augusta's lover was not Sir Henry Halford, the courtly physician with whom her name has been linked. She did exchange long and frequent letters with him, though he was a married man. Whether that friendship was innocent or not we shall probably never now know, for the letters were handed over to Queen Victoria by a member of the Halford family, the last of that medical baronet's line. All we can be sure of is that rumour has made much more than four from two and two, as usual.

We do know that Augusta was deeply in love with, and longed to marry; another man, and that he was a distinguished soldier.

No family complications marred this love. He was a bachelor, and therefore free to marry her. It was she who was not free to marry him.

Honesty and courage were Augusta's favourite virtues, of which she never ceased to talk. So she found herself what she called an 'honest man and highly distinguished character', and one whose courage was undisputed.

Augusta herself was courageous. It was she who was to take the lead when the princesses finally nerved themselves to rebel against the Queen's tyranny. She was the one who rejoiced in her brothers' deeds in battle, and who, in the presence of the wives and families of wounded officers, found it in her heart to be glad of her brother Ernest's dreadful and disfiguring wound, and wrote that she 'would have been quite shocked else not to have had one little bit of glory among ourselves!' She would have taken readily to bestowing white feathers, one feels. Naturally such a spirit chose a gallant soldier for her love.

We cannot be absolutely sure who he was. Here more than ever reticent, Augusta took care never to name him precisely in the letters in which she set down her palpitating references to 'the secret of her heart'. However, historians have collated her allusions to his profession, the periods when, and the places

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where, he was serving abroad, and his appointment as an equerry at Court, and as a staff officer, with the information available concerning prominent soldiers of the day. The evidence, though circumstantial, is fairly strong. We can name with some confidence the man who gave rise to so many anguished frettings in the bosom of Augusta of England.

She was probably about thirty-two when she first met him. He was an Irishman, Brigadier-General Brent Spencer, the son of a country squire and a very brave, if rather odd, gentleman whose life had been the army since the age of seventeen. When he and Augusta met he had already seen a good deal of active service, much of it abroad. He was just back, with her soldier-brother, the Duke of York, from the unhappy expedition to the Helder. The Duke brought home no glory from his command, but he had singled out Brent Spencer (who had commanded a regiment) for special praise in dispatches.

Spencer had all the Irishman's courage. 'A zealous, gallant officer, without any great military genius,' one officer summed him up, 'anxious and fidgety when there was nothing to do, but once under fire like a philosopher solving a problem.'

Rather a fiery philosopher, perhaps, if we remember the story of the landing at Aboukir Bay, when Spencer, on seeing a French marksman aiming at him from behind a sandhill, brandished his cane in a transport of rage, and shouted 'Oh, you scoundrel!' The Frenchman took to his heels. Spencer, we must conclude, must have been a formidable figure when angry.

Wellington began by thinking highly of Spencer, but soon lost his admiration for him. He found his fellow-Irishman inconsistent to the point of unreliability, and said that Spencer was apt to give his opinion on every subject, and change it with the wind. In 1831 Wellington told a story of Spencer's cheerfully departing from the truth, as it seemed, by inventing a whole reserve of French troops on the heights of Torres Vegas in order to help a colleague before a Court of Inquiry.

*Wellington.* 'So I said to him, "Why, Spencer, I never heard of this reserve before. How is it that you only mention it now?" "Oh," said he, "poor Burrard has so large a family!" I had no desire either to give pain or trouble either to Burrard or Spencer, who was a very odd sort of man, and I did not urge my questions on this point before the Court.'

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This conversation took place in the presence of John Wilson Croker, Secretary to the Admiralty for over twenty years. Wellington himself was well known for his eccentricities, and Croker, yet another Irishman, was by no means without character. A writer with a poisoned quill, he was the contributor to the *Quarterly Review* who is still execrated for the notice which 'killed Keats'. Macaulay 'detested him more than cold boiled veal'. There was, however, no virulence in this picture of Brent Spencer. Croker merely set down a record of Wellington's reminiscing with him and Colonel Sir Henry Cooke ('Kangaroo' Cooke, sometime private secretary to the Duke of York and a Member of Parliament) about this comical, very 'Irish' soldier.

*Wellington.* 'Spencer was exceedingly puzzle-headed, but very formal; he one day came to me, and very slowly said, "Sir, I have the honour of reporting that the enemy has evacuated Castello Bono." It was not Castello Bono but Carpio, as, indeed, we could all see, and his aide-de-camp whispered him the right word, upon which Spencer began again, as slowly and solemnly as before, "Sir, I have — the — honour — to — report etc., ending once more with "Castello Bono", and, though he made three several attempts, he never could get rid of Castello Bono. He would talk of the Thames for the Tagus, and so on, eh, Cooke?'

*Cooke.* 'Yes, Sir; it was to me he talked of the Thames. He told me one day to get my horse and just trot down to the Thames, and see what they were doing there! I told him that I wished with all my heart I could!'

This Brent Spencer was a well set-up man, with a fine beak of a nose, side-whiskers, a short upper lip, and a prominent chin. He must have cut a dashing figure in his brilliant scarlet coat, his cockaded bicorne hat, and his gold lace. Augusta asked nothing more of life than to be allowed to settle down with her soldier, and was glad enough to identify herself with a soldier's wife, any soldier's wife, as she sometimes did in her letters. Her governess had found that '*Auguste a été, et est toujours, la plus humble*' of the sisters.

She showed less philosophy about her lover's active service than about her brother's, however. She fretted for his discharge,



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and worried herself into a pitiable state when he was in action. She must have been very relieved when, eleven years after their first meeting, Spencer was superseded in the post of second-in-command in the Peninsula, and failed to get the Commandership-in-Chief in America. He resigned and bought a small estate at Lea, within an easy drive of Windsor. There he led a peaceful retired life, seeing only a few friends. He had by then been created a Knight of the Bath, and, though retired from the army and holding no appointment at Court, was in due course promoted General, and created G.C.B. No doubt he saw a good deal of the faithful princess.

In March of the year after his retirement, she wrote a long letter to her brother, by then the Regent, since the King had been incurably mad since 1810.

‘You will recollect that on the King’s Birthday, 1808, we had an hour of very serious conversation after dinner, in which I took an opportunity of disclosing to you the secret of my heart. You kindly said that you had often remarked a gloom on my countenance which you were certain proceeded from some secret cause of anxiety and therefore had thought it more delicate not to notice it to me . . . until that day I felt I could not speak to you about it. Had not the object of my affections been then abroad, and that my anxiety for his safety and welfare was put to the trial for a second time (with a greater likelihood of his duty retaining him in a foreign country) I do not think I should have spoken up on the subject, but my heart was full of care.

‘I also mentioned his noble conduct in having offered for my sake to give up his situation about the King, or at least to plead his being on the staff, that he might not come too often where we must meet in circumstances he was aware most painful to us both. But I intreated him to remember that it was to his own private worth as well as to his public services that he owed the being appointed equerry to the King, and that it was my duty to exert every effort not to express my feelings both for his sake and my own.’

He was to take his regular annual waiting, she had suggested, but come as seldom as he could at other times. ‘To this plan he agreed fully, and he has never deviated from this line of conduct.’

When he was ‘ordered abroad a third time’ it had been a consolation to her to know that her two eldest brothers would

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have felt for her if he had fallen, 'and have affectionately soothed my wounded heart'. She was certain that they would have respected and esteemed a man who had always acted so honourably towards their sister.

Still, Augusta was not content to let matters rest as they were. She had the shadow, but she sought the substance, and in the following paragraph she says very plainly what it is that she wants from her powerful brother.

'I now beseech you, my dearest, to consider our situation. If it is in your power to make us happy I know you will. I am sensible that should you agree to our union it can only proceed from your affection for me, and your desire of promoting my happiness and that of a worthy man. It is not a fancy taken up vaguely, our acquaintance having existed for twelve years, and our attachment been mutually acknowledged nine years ago.

'To you we look up, for our future comfort and peace of mind. Your sanction is what we aspire to. And as of course it will be necessary to keep it a secret, and as it must be quite a private marriage, if you think it more proper in your situation not to be present at it (which I need not assure you would be a sad disappointment to us both) I entreat your permission that dear Frederick [the Duke of York] may attend for you.

'The world, if it ever hears of this circumstance, may be astonished, but it cannot blame our conduct, especially when it knows we are supported and encouraged by my brothers, nor can it allege any deceit to our behaviour.

'Our sentiments were of too delicate a nature for us to make them known, unless at a moment when we might hope to have our sufferings relieved . . . this was my own secret, and in no particular can I tax my heart with having deceived them on this occasion, for there is no duplicity in silence.'

Augusta then begs her brother to intercede with the Queen, for she is afraid to mention the subject herself to that unbending little tyrant whose views she well knows. She says that she is 'too honest to affect asking for her consent, as it is not necessary', but wants her informed of the step she hopes to take.

'I am certain the Queen cannot approve if she merely thinks of my birth and station. But that is the only reason she can object to it, and I shall never blame her for it.'

And she sings her lover's praises proudly.

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'But when she considers the character of the man, the faithfulness and length of our attachment, the struggles that I have been compelled to make, never retracting from any of my duties, though suffering martyrdom from anxiety of mind and deprivation of happiness, I am sure that she will say that long and great has been my trial, and correct has been my conduct . . . I will confess that I am proud of possessing the affection and good opinion of an honest man and highly distinguished character, and I am sure that what you can do to make us happy you will not leave undone.'

Perhaps we shall never know whether the Regent granted his sister's agonized prayer for a private 'marriage'.

There are several pieces of circumstantial evidence which make it seem possible, if no more.

The strongest (and that is not very strong) is that Spencer was chosen by the Home Secretary as the messenger to bring the news of the death of Princess Charlotte, the Prince Regent's daughter and heir to the throne, to Windsor. Augusta describes very emotionally to Lady Harcourt his breaking of the news.

'He came to my door; and his step was so heavy and his knock so short it was really like the knell of death. But when I saw his face, I called out "Oh! that look kills me!" We could neither of us speak a word; but after a little while he put Lord Sidmouth's most distressing but humane letter into my trembling hand . . .'

Though that letter may help to suggest that Brent Spencer and Augusta had a tenderness for each other it does not prove that they were 'married' to each other. It is really no stronger evidence for the 'marriage' than William IV's boisterously nicknaming a Miss Clitherow 'Princess Augusta', and giving as his reason that she was the old maid of the family, as the princess was of his own, is evidence against it.

We have no letters written by Princess Augusta in the year of Brent Spencer's death, and she undoubtedly wrote many, for all these girls scribbled as hard as the Brontës, or harder. In her grief she might have broken silence and named 'the secret of her heart'.

Eight years later, on the death of another man, she did write, 'I respect grief. I have had my share, and I know the spirits ought not to be hurried.'

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If the message written on a piece of paper and attached to a miniature of Princess Augusta which reached Christie's this year, 1958, tells the truth, the miniature was taken from the neck of Sir Brent Spencer on his death. The gold locket bears the letters A.S., which *may* have meant Augusta Spencer and not Augusta Sophia to the lovers, for the sisters took great joy in adopting the surnames of their less exalted partners. The portrait, not a great work of art, is a copy of a Beechey study of her of which several variations were at one time popularized. Perhaps significantly, it shows Augusta wearing a simple handkerchief on her head, and looking very much the pretty, ordinary girl she so longed to be, one to whom a modest soldier might aspire without fear, and one whom he might command without *lèse majesté*. The miniature was bought for the royal collection at Windsor without reaching the salerooms.

The Queen's last hours were comforted by the daughter who had dared to resist her, and in her will, made a day before her death, she left her the house and farm at Frogmore. Two years later Augusta moved to it, on the death of her father, who suddenly, in his eighty-second year, in the incoherent hell of his lunacy, seemed to have decided to be done with life, and to have quickly starved himself to death.

There she found the only home she was ever to have, a solitary one. It was there that she was visited by the sister who had married the last suitor her father had rejected for her, Elizabeth, wife of the Landgrave of Hesse Homburg.

## CHAPTER 12

### *Fatima*

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**T**he third princess was Elizabeth.

Princess Elizabeth would marry, but not until she was nearing fifty, not until the King her father was old, blind and incurably mad, and then only because she was willing to take a groom even less attractive than her eldest sister's had been.

It was in 1818 that Elizabeth was to marry Frederick the Hereditary Prince (later the Landgrave) of Hesse Homburg, the man who fourteen years before had been rejected for Augusta. Augusta, it is true, at nearly half a century, had lost both her girlish good looks and her figure, but then Elizabeth was only two years younger, and had never been slender. To their niece Charlotte they had both been 'old maids' with 'dreadful sower faces' for many years. Perhaps the fact that she was not the bride in 1818 is the strongest argument, among many weak ones, for Augusta's having been 'married' to Sir Brent Spencer.

Elizabeth, nicknamed Fatima by her sisters in an atrocious pun, had always been noticeably plump. Not to mince words, as Mrs. Papendiek says, 'she was born fat, and through every illness, of which she had many, she never lost flesh'. Easy-going and indolent, with no pretensions to beauty, the roly-poly princess cared not a hoot. Her letters are full of references to food and her enjoyment of it, such as when she wrote, 'Having . . . had a large plumb cake put up as *stowage for the stomach*, I rejoiced much at the thought of seizing this when I got back to the coach; but the moment I had prepared myself in battle array, with a knife in my hand to begin the massacre, they told me it was for Mama, and my knife returned innocent to my pocket.' Or, again, after a journey without breakfast, when 'Fortune proved kind, for the door opening, we all scrambled in as fast as possible; and the table, which was very well stored, was soon

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in a very naked condition.' She continued all her life to eat well, and even perhaps to over-eat, as when she said she was 'taken exceedingly ill in the night, violently sick, and so swelled that they think I must have been poisoned, and that owing to a remarkable large lobster which I had eat of at supper'.

Even as a new bride Elizabeth did not treat her personal attractions seriously, and was able to take herself off in mocking comparison with her more fortunate sister-in-law, the wife of her brother Ernest, Duke of Cumberland.

'I must make you laugh,' she wrote to her eldest brother, by then the Prince Regent, 'at her asking me, with my ugly figure, to put on one of her gowns. I could not help saying, "Do look at your beautiful figure, and look at mine! You mean it kind, but thank God I am not a fool!"'

Not that this modest princess was quite without physical charm. There is a contemporary description which paints her as 'the Lady E——' as, 'without being thin and taper', yet 'limber and elegant, elastic and well-contoured'.

One sees exactly what the writer (Thomas Ashe, a raffish litterateur) meant as one looks at her portraits. With her plump, deft little hands, and her plump, neat little feet and her plump, compact little postures, she was obviously very different from her gangling elder sisters.

Elizabeth was full of energy, and very self-assured. To use a homely plebeian phrase, 'there was no doubt about her'. One can well understand how, after the departure of Royal to Würtemberg, her Swiss governess could say that Princess Elizabeth '*en a pris un petit air de conséquence, elle est un personnage dans la maison*'; and Augusta was then the senior personage in the company of sisters, not Elizabeth.

Self-important or not, she was good-natured, generous to the point of folly, and, at least in her own eyes, frank. In a singularly uncandid family she prided herself on being a 'Sally Blunt'. Her niece, Princess Charlotte, spoke of her 'deepness and cleverness', and the Archduke John of Austria found her 'a bit of an intriguer'. In that family, however, discretion, tact, and circumvention reached proportions which came near to vice, and Elizabeth may have considered that she was straightforward and honest when to others she may have appeared falseness personified.

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Her most endearing characteristic was a passionate love of children, outstanding even among the sisters, and a willingness to go to much trouble to woo and please them.

Elizabeth was the 'artist' of the family—much as Augusta was the musician. Augusta used to 'compose' airs and sing to her own accompaniment, but her efforts were really only what Fanny Burney kindly called 'unconscious medley reminiscences'. Pictures of Princess Elizabeth almost invariably show her with pencil or brush poised.



*George III—silhouette cut by his daughter, Princess Elizabeth, from an original by an unknown artist.*

She exercised her rather derivative talent with indefatigable zeal, taking with facility now to crayon, now to pastel, now to charcoal, water-colour, gouache, or mezzotint; now drawing, now engraving, now lithographing, and now japanning. Dimpled, cuddly cupids; quivers and arrows; flags, drums and muskets; urns, doves, twining roses, shamrocks, and classical and allegorical figures in graceful attitudes and flowing robes were her stock-in-trade. Though commendable, her work was obviously that of an amateur, and when it was published some tactful touching up had to be done. Her most enjoyable studies are perhaps the silhouettes she, in common with so many, inked, painted and cut out. They, as in the witty little one of her father above, sometimes reflect the sharper observation of others.

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This princess was the one occasionally referred to as 'Mrs. Ramus'—another of those insubstantial rumours which attached themselves to nearly all the princesses at one time or another, and which probably all had their origin in Princess Sophia's misfortune.

Like all the princesses, Fatima longed to marry. She often declared that she would marry as soon as ever she found an opportunity of doing so. At the age of twenty-six, encouraged by Royal's betrothal, she was writing hopefully to the Prince of Wales:

'I trust that the Princess Royal's being determined upon may open the way for others, for times are much changed, and every young woman who has been brought up as we have been through the goodness of Mama must look forward to settlement, which was I to say *I* did not, your own good sense must tell you is false.'

The sentence may be involved, but the thought is clear. 'Sally' was being 'blunt'.

She was not particularly ambitious in her day-dreams of domestic life. It was half in earnest, we feel, that she wrote to Lady Harcourt (whom she said she looked upon 'as *no common friend*, but really *a Rock*'), that 'It was certainly intended that I should live in the country and been [*sic*] a younger brother's wife, for I do not understand Court quarrels.' She signed that letter 'Cinderella E.'

Then, writing to Lord Harcourt, she laughingly proposed herself as housekeeper for a fortnight to Horace Walpole, Lord Orford, at Strawberry Hill, in the following terms.

'In case of your hearing that Lord O. is in want of one, send to such a no., in such a place, near such a street, by such a Castle, in such a Lodge, you will find a discreet, steady young woman who bears a tolerable good character . . . who will be willing to enter into such a capacity; she is a single woman.'

At the age of thirty-four, undaunted, she was still confiding in the same eldest brother that she yearned to pour out her love on others, starved though she had been of it at home.

'I believe we feel that sort of thing more than many people from knowing it so little ourselves—it may in the long run be of use to us, but do not say I have said this—a time may come when—but, no, I better hold my tongue——'



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At the time when this letter was written the King's reason was again precariously balanced, and all around him were suffering the strain of his capricious behaviour. This, of all times, was not one for a daughter to broach the always explosive subject of marriage.

What was the unspoken thought in Elizabeth's mind? What was the time that might come? A time when her hopes might be voiced and considered by a reasonable father? Or was she looking to his heir? And, if the latter, then as Regent or King?

'Burn this, pray,' she adds to the prince, chiding herself for her imprudence.

Two years later she went so far as to write to Lady Harcourt:

'I now pray to the Almighty to leave this country . . . My much beloved Mother knows a little how much we all wish to be gone, but a daughter who loves her as truly as I do, must feel the delicacy of speaking too openly on a subject which separates one from her; but indeed, indeed it is most necessary . . . do get him [her eldest brother] to wish us all away . . .'

Four years later a definite hope burgeoned. We find her writing, no less kittenishly, though her fortieth birthday is on the horizon, a long letter to the same brother about a plot to marry her to someone whom she refers to simply as 'them'.

'Them' was Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans, the strange figure whom Edward, the Duke of Kent, had come across during his poverty-stricken exile in Canada fourteen years before. Kent himself was never out of debt, and was probably nearly as hard-pressed as the Frenchman, but he had scraped together two hundred pounds to help the royal pauper, and 'eke out his salary as an American schoolmaster'. Since then Louis Philippe had come to England, and Kent hoped to marry his friend to his sister Elizabeth.

The difficulty about which Elizabeth was writing to her brother was, naturally, Queen Charlotte. The plan had been confided to her, and she shrank from inviting disaster. She well knew the King's feelings about the marriage of a daughter even to the most unexceptionable of suitors. What would he feel about a French Roman Catholic?

So Elizabeth wrote to her brother on September 25th, 1808, an even more disjointed letter than usual.

' . . . having heard that a letter of confidence has been written

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to you on my subject by a person who shall be nameless—on Thursday I was asked [by the Queen] whether I knew this, and if my brothers had spoke to me—the whole detail you will see in a letter enclosed which Augusta gives my mother today . . . I had flattered myself that from my constant steady attendance upon my mother, with my natural openness of character, I had hoped she would have had confidence in me at my time of life, but finding alas to my grief that was not the case I thought it more honourable by her and just towards myself to let her know I was not ignorant of what had passed, with my sentiments and feelings upon it.

‘If there is no possibility of the thing *now*, I only entreat of you as the person, both from inclination, duty and affection we must look up to, that you will not dash the cup of happiness from my lips.

‘Yet, believe me, whatever I may feel at present, and flattered at having been thought of, if I did not hope, I flatter myself, I might make *them* happy, I would not think of it, and being without any soul near them that might worry and plague on the score of religion, I do not fear it, for you know I hate meddling, have no turn for gossiping, and being firm to my own faith I shall not plague them upon theirs.’

In short, she wants to marry ‘them’, in the future if not then, and does not give a jot about his being a Roman Catholic.

‘Burn this . . .’ she ends. ‘And all I wish [from] you is a shewable to ask me if my mother has not told me, which at my age you supposed she had . . .’

A ‘shewable’ was a letter suitable to be shown to the Queen.

Queen Charlotte, for whatever reasons, was obstinately against the marriage, but the Prince of Wales stoutly went on with the negotiations for it. A week later Elizabeth is writing to him again, completely baffled and infuriated by the Queen’s tactics, which were simply not to refer to the subject. All she wished, she now declares, was that her mother should have mentioned it. Now she seems to have lost hope of the marriage coming off at once, and there is a mysterious reference to a talk she and her mother had once had and which had brought her father’s name into the discussion.

‘Do you think, my dear brother, I would have wished it brought forward, after all I have seen? Good God, no!—and I

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think that by the whole manner of the D— of O—'s conduct they would have agreed to what may be unfortunate to us, but which will make everything *couleur de rose* afterwards, by considering my father before ourselves.'

Elizabeth here seems to mean that she would not wish to precipitate the actual marriage, knowing as she does the terrible effect it might have on her father, especially as she is of opinion that the Duke of Orleans and his advisers would have agreed to delay ('what may be unfortunate to us'), presumably until her father was no longer alive, when with a good conscience they might marry.

'I said that day on which my mother spoke with me,' Elizabeth goes on, "'you shall never see a wry face," and, believe me, she never shall, for I have gone on just the same, and will do so to the last, for without being a perfect good daughter I never can make a good wife.'

It is not clear when the talk she is referring to took place, or what Queen Charlotte asked of her daughter which made her suppress a wry face. Did she on some momentous occasion, realizing, as the King's ministers did, that any crossing of his will was likely to unsettle his reason, make his daughters solemnly promise not to raise the subject of marriage during his lifetime? Perhaps nothing else would account for the Queen's granite refusal even to hear or speak of the subject. Elizabeth, on the other hand, might here be protesting that she should be allowed to mention the Duke's proposal in order to accept it, not for the present, but for some distant future of uncertain date.

Her sisters at home watched her with pity. Commending them, Elizabeth said, 'the state I was in made them see I was all but wild'. The youngest princess was told nothing, 'from delicacy'. She was, as we shall see, even then suffering most terribly from her own frustrated love affair.

Elizabeth did not intend to let her suitor slip through nerveless fingers. She did all she could to clinch the Duke's offer. She begged her brother to steal a meeting with her before he saw the Queen, 'and many things I will then tell you which determined me at once to say I would never give it up—for it was hinted many, many things had been brought forward and rejected without a word from us, and therefore we all felt the sun of our days was set——'

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'The sun of our days was set.' What a terrible phrase, especially from that garrulous, chirrupy pen! At last the princesses were learning of all the proposals which had been rejected for them without their having an inkling of what was afoot.

All her resolution would do her no good, however. Elizabeth would have to 'give it up'. She gave up more than she knew, for no one expected in those days, with Napoleon the all-conquering colossus, that this poor nobleman, not even the next in succession, would be sitting on the throne of France in six years' time.

Nine days later she was still hopefully discussing the legal status of children of the union, but she was never to be Queen of France, and never to bear children for Louis Philippe or any other man. The Duke left England almost at once, and all was over.

In that letter, last referred to, to her brother (in which, rather comically, the home-keeping princess abjures Prinny not to be shy about discussing the begetting of children with the Frenchman), we see Elizabeth, in her turn, face to face with the Royal Marriages Act.

'I think it right to tell you that in examining the business more closely I find no marriage whatever can be looked upon as valid without the sovereign's consent, which alone makes the law.'

Elizabeth seems to have been only half-informed, for we remember that, as she was over twenty-five, there was a further step open to her in the event of the sovereign's refusing his consent, which was, in effect, an appeal to the Privy Council and Parliament. It is not surprising, however, if she did not pursue this possibility in detail, for the real obstacle was the necessity to ask the sovereign in the first place, and there was no way round that except the one she had already thought of, delay until his death or removal by other means.

This marriage would presumably have gone through if her brother had then been Regent instead of, as he was, still only Prince of Wales, despite the fact that the Marriages Act (as had been pointed out in Parliament) did not say whether the power of consent devolved on the Regent. He took it upon himself when he did become so. Dynastically it would have been a magnificent alliance. Domestically the two, both comfortable by nature as well as in figure, both simple and home-loving, both

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used to being made the toys of fortune, might have been well suited. The artistic lady and the royal schoolmaster would probably have made a go of it. True, his fortunes did not run smooth, but she might have shared them with fortitude and resolution and not regarded as unrelieved disaster his third flight and refuge in her own country, had she lived to share it with him.

\* \* \*

After such an experience Elizabeth might have been forgiven for giving up hope. Her hopes, if not dead, did seem quiescent by 1810. Stubbornly, she still dreamed of a home of her own, but by that time it was a spinster hearth on which her thoughts dwelt lovingly.

'I have been well tried in the spring and summer of life,' she wrote to that eldest brother, and she looked forward to a comfortable autumn and winter. Kind and good friends, a great chair, a pinch of snuff, a book, and a good fireside, with a kind brother, those were then the sum total of her hopes. Yet a St. Martin's summer was to burst upon Elizabeth, and transform her days. Lucky Elizabeth was to be borne off at last.

It was eight long years later, and after her brother had become Regent, that the yearned-for 'settlement' was to come.

On January 28th, 1818, Elizabeth received a letter informing her of the arrival in England of the Hereditary Prince of Hesse Homburg, and his intention of asking her hand in matrimony.

'You may easily conceive,' she wrote to her brother in a state of excitement which this time betrayed itself in her spelling and grammar as well as in her style, 'the sort of flurry it through [*sic*] me into. I instantly went to Augusta and Mary, and we agreed that I must instantly inform the Queen of it in the morning, which I did before my sisters. She answered, upon my reading the letter, "You always wished to settle and have always said that you thought a woman might be happier and more comfortable in having a home."

'I answer [*sic*] I have ever thought so, and add that a time may come when I shall bless God for a home. In our situation there is nothing but character to look to, and Count Munster says that the Prince's is excellent. I therefore candidly own I wish to accept this offer.'

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It was all a glorious surprise, or so the princess said, and the Regent, and even the Foreign Secretary, were taken unawares. Perhaps the prince who came a-wooing for the second time had been warned, or knew from experience, that it would be good tactics to take the old Queen by storm. That, and the fact that she was dying, may account for her unexpected weakening when she was confronted with the news.

Elizabeth was not fooled into believing that there would be no obstructiveness, however, and merely took advantage of the favourable wind to hurry on preparations for her wedding. She shut her eyes and her ears to clear signs of her mother's approaching end. Mary, the soft-hearted, reported that the Queen was 'really overcome and crying dreadfully', but Elizabeth merely begged her brother to prepare the prince for an unpleasant reception from her mother: 'my mother is a spoilt child, for my father spoilt her from the hour she came, and we have continued doing so from the hour of our birth, and she is vexed that she cannot manage this her own way'. Princess Mary was right when she said that 'Eliza and the Queen would be better parted.'

The dying Queen still did her best to stop her daughter marrying. The Regent, who alone could sometimes manage her, strove to bring her round. The struggle was fierce, but in the end fortune smiled on Elizabeth and she was able to inscribe in her prayer book on St. Valentine's Day the suitable entry 'Saw the H.P. of Hesse Homburg for ye 1st time at the Queen's House.'

'In our situation', Elizabeth had said before meeting her widower, 'there is nothing but character to look to.' After this first meeting she chose to emphasize her suitor's 'extreme honesty and integrity', and to say nothing of what he looked like. Alas! the husbands whom fate brought to these patient princesses were far from glamorous, and in the lottery Princess Elizabeth drew the poorest prize of all, as far as looks were concerned. Whether from shock or discretion, the princess who had called herself 'Sally Blunt' was not outspoken on this occasion.

Others were not as reticent. One M.P., Mr. W. H. Fremantle, an ardent champion of the princesses, was appalled.

'It is impossible', he wrote to the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, 'to describe the monster of a man—a vulgar-looking

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German corporal, whose breath and hide is a compound between tobacco and garlick. What can have induced her, nobody can guess; he has about £300 per annum. The Queen is outrageous, but obliged to submit. It will be a dreadful blow to her, and I should not wonder if, after the princess is gone abroad, she sinks under it. She is much altered, and, I think, breaking fast.'

The marriage, he said, was 'universally quizzed and condemned'.

The Duke also heard from another M.P., Mr. C. W. Williams Wynn on the same subject—a husband for the Princess 'as fat as herself'.

'I have just seen H— H— at the levee; and an uglier hound, with a snout buried in hair, I never saw.'

In exile on his island Napoleon scornfully commented to his doctor, 'the English royal family *va incanagliarsi* with little petty princes to whom I would not have given a brevet of *sous-lieutenant*'.

A hundred funny stories went the rounds about the hairy ogre with the huge moustaches and whiskers, whose smoking was regarded as disgusting by men who prided themselves on their regular performances at drinking bouts. The wags were delighted when, as Mr. Williams Wynn retailed to his Duke, 'the Queen dropt her fan at York House, and Humbug stooped with so much alacrity to pick it up, that the exertion created so parlous a split, and produced such a display, that there was nothing left to the bride's imagination. Nothing remained but for the royal brothers to interpose their screen, and for him to retire as fast as he could. It was then proposed that he should go home, but he declined this, "as the Duke of York was so much more large, dat he was sure his breeches would go on over all." The valet was called, the Duke's breeches drawn on over the poor remains of Humbug's, and succeeded to admiration.'

This oaf, it was said, snored at the theatre, and he was even accused of being dirty. Lady Jerningham declared that before his wedding-day 'They immersed him several times in a warm bath to make him a little clean; and they kept him three days from smoking, which, as he smoked five pipes a day, was a great forbearance.'

But to Princess Elizabeth April 7th, 1818, was a joyful day. Proof against her mother's tears, proof even against the fact

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that her mother was dying, she could easily be deaf to the wits, and careless of her bridegroom's poverty, simplicity and lack of charm. She came smiling from the altar on the arm of her perhaps uncouth but essentially decent soldier—a well-seasoned soldier, whom she was pleased to call her 'hero'. She was clad in shining silver, with flounces of Brussels lace, and her head was proudly plumed with ostrich feathers. She was nearly forty-eight.

The Hereditary Prince was so sick in the honeymoon carriage that he had to get out and climb into the dickey. Arrived at the Royal Lodge, lent by the Regent, he soon recovered. His tactlessness must have been in proportion to his size, since he is reported to have said that 'he was not so much *ennuyé* at the Cottage as he expected, having passed all his time in his dressing-gown and slippers, smoking in the conservatory'—obviously the only place where he could make up for lost time with his beloved pipe without upsetting the English.

Elizabeth had no complaints, however. As she waited to board the royal yacht and sail away for good she thanked God and her brother 'for having given me so excellent a being, whose one thought is to make me happy'.

Schiller's widow believed that 'the idea came from England', that the affair was 'proposed without his participation', and that he was 'too old to make his choice entirely from inclination and love'. Perhaps Elizabeth taught him to love her, for the same widow wrote of her three months after her arrival in her diminutive kingdom-to-be, 'Her great riches delight her, but only the sharing of them with her husband, and she says that she first learned to know the value of money when she was able to give it to her husband; alone she took no pleasure in it.' Elizabeth had £6,000 a year from England as her jointure and much of it went on repairs to her new family's dilapidated castles.

It is not, I think, going too far to say that Elizabeth would never have married at all had her father been sane and her mother as well, and therefore as unyielding, as in former days. She was correct in thanking God and her brother for her husband, such as he was, and late as he came. He was her 'beloved husband', her 'excellent husband', her '*bien et très cher Fritz*', her '*cher et adoré Fritz*'.



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She continued happy, or considered herself so, in her marriage, and in her new country. She was able to clean them both up somewhat in time.

'You would be astonished at the extream filth and dirt one meets with—it drives me near wild,' she wrote to Lady Banks, the wife of the famous naturalist Sir Joseph Banks, 'but I have a regiment of females who I keep to sweep, to wipe, to clean.'

And Bluff, as she also called her husband, six years later struck a visiting Englishwoman, Miss Cornelia Knight, whom Elizabeth had known as one of her mother's ladies, as not only frank, kindly, generous, humane and well read in history and geography, but 'remarkably neat in his person, and never came into company without changing his dress if he had been smoking'. His homeliness was less striking in his own country where his wife found that all the gentlemen looked 'as if they had been picked out to prevent the dear Landgrave being jealous, for I do declare such a frightful set of men never was seen—Monsters!'

'I thoroughly believe', she wrote to her old nurse after eight years of marriage, 'that few in my situation of life are as happy as I am. My dear Landgrave dotes on home, and we hardly ever quit it.' Her kingdom was 'my own dear little Homburg', and she did not envy her eldest sister her tinsel glories as Queen of Würtemberg.

Eleven years to the month after her wedding day she lost her Bluff, and in her grief she wrote with obvious sincerity:

'No woman was ever more happy than I was for eleven years, and they will often be lived over again in the memory of the heart.'

So we may say that things turned out unexpectedly well for Princess Elizabeth in the end, and that she determinedly enjoyed to the full her late-arriving 'cup of happiness'. Still, perhaps one may be forgiven for wishing that someone with such a capacity for happiness should have been able to enjoy it in the days of her youth, as would have been natural, and for lamenting that she married too late in life to have that happiness for very long, or to contemplate the prospect of children of her own.

The plump and dimpled babies with which Elizabeth so abundantly decorated her artistic efforts had to suffice her overflowing maternal heart.

## CHAPTER 13

### *'Dear, Perfect Minny'*

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**T**he fourth princess was Princess Mary. Perhaps it is time to recapitulate the love lives of the three of George III's six daughters we have so far considered; that of the Princess Royal, who escaped by unique good fortune from her father's shadow to the arms of the large Würtemberger; of Princess Augusta, the spinster, whose suitors were all driven away while her father was omnipotent, and who was never able to acknowledge her puzzle-headed Irishman as her husband; and of Princess Elizabeth, who did succeed in marrying, when no longer young, one of the suitors formerly rejected for her sister, and who found happiness with him for eleven years.

Of the three remaining daughters, Mary, Sophia and Amelia, only one married. This was Mary, the acknowledged beauty of the family.

Mary, the fourth daughter, was an affectionate girl who won her sisters' love, though not their trust. To them she was 'dearest Minny', or 'dear, perfect Minny', and she was always willing to nurse them when they were ill.

She was much too pliable, however. These 'poor Girls', as Sophia called her sisters and herself, all tried to love their difficult mother, but Mary was wax in her hands. Then, she never could keep a secret. In the end at least one of her sisters grew bitter and called her 'Mama's tool', and her niece found her 'too great a repeater'.

The slender accommodating girl had only her face and her character with which to charm, but they were always enough. She had no talents. She neither drew, played nor sang in an age when any accomplished young lady must do at least one of the three to pass muster, and despite the lavish tuition the King provided for his daughters. She was not intelligent; perhaps she even verged on the simple. But besides having a pretty face

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she was willing to please, to chatter, to gossip, and, everyone agreed, had outstanding 'manners'. Lord Malmesbury found her in later life 'all good humour and pleasantness'. 'Her manners are perfect,' he said of her, 'and I never saw or conversed with any princess so exactly what she ought to be.' Henry Greville, one of the earnest diarists of the time, echoed him, calling her 'the most amiable and least troublesome princess it is possible to see', and on her death, saying, 'She was a kind-hearted woman, and a perfect lady in mind and manners.' 'Marie', her Swiss governess wrote of her in her girlhood, '*est fort gaye, un peu comère, mais si bonne, si facile à vivre qu'elle se fait aimer de tout le monde*'. That she should have to be a little *commère*, rather a tattler, bears out her sisters' and her niece's strictures, but even the critical Mlle Moula readily admitted her outstanding and engaging agreeableness.

Mary married when she was forty. Needless to say, the King was not then on the throne, and she, like Elizabeth, owed her thanks to her eldest brother. That at the time of her betrothal she was able to lament that she was not to receive the blessing and approbation of 'my most valuable and respectable father' spoke better for her heart than her head. There would most certainly have been no betrothal had he been in power, and she must have known that well.

Her bridegroom was her first cousin, the Duke of Gloucester, the same age as herself, and the child of that secret marriage of the King's brother, her uncle, with Maria Waldegrave, which had so wounded her father and confirmed his belief in the necessity of putting a stop to all such escapades in the royal family in the future. His anger would probably have been even greater had he been able to foresee that a son of that union would one day marry the most beautiful of all his daughters. However, in 1816 he was not consulted, and he died four years later, presumably in happy (if one can use such a word of the 'old, mad, blind, despised and dying king') ignorance of the match.

Weary of recording the perhaps amusing but rather unrelieved grossities of the husbands of Royal and Elizabeth, and the eccentricities of Princess Augusta's lover, I wish that I might vary these pages by at least describing Princess Mary's husband as tall, thin and handsome, valiant, intelligent, charming and distinguished. Unfortunately, the facts forbid. No one in his day

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could paint the Duke of Gloucester as better than an infuriating nincompoop, and his reputation has not much improved since his death.

He was known as ‘Silly Billy’, ‘Slice of Gloucester’, or ‘Cheese’. As a boy he was lank and shambling, with feet which turned outwards, and he did not grow in grace as he achieved manhood.

He did go up to Cambridge, and he was given a degree, but those facts are a comment on the snobbery of universities rather than testimony to his intellect. Most of his knowledge seems to have been on a level with his acquaintance with geography. When an Admiral told this Duke that he had just travelled almost to the North Pole, Gloucester is said to have remarked that he was so sunburnt he would have thought he had been to the *South* Pole.

He was an overweening snob himself, this son of a royal duke and the woman who had driven a rag-and-bone cart in Holborn and had (among her more honest occupations) at one time sold old clothes over the counter of a Pall Mall shop. An observer once commented on him:

‘The Duke, in common with all persons who are not quite sure of their position—for he was not then a Royal Highness, a title conferred on his marriage with Princess Mary—exact more than royal respect and attention. He never allowed a gentleman to be seated in his presence, and expected the ladies of the party to hand him coffee on a salver, to stand while he drank it, and then remove the cup. He always travelled in great state.’

Gloucester had plenty of the wrong kind of pride, but little of the right. He bore no resentment against the King for freely expressing his scorn of his mother as is clear from the remark made by his Cambridge tutor to a gentleman visitor who had picked up the fiddle lying on a table in his rooms and had asked if the prince played. ‘Not much,’ replied the tutor, ‘only God save his uncle, and such little things.’

As to the Duke’s appearance, Stockmar, the shrewd German physician, described him as having ‘prominent, meaningless eyes; without actually being ugly, a very unpleasant face, with an animal expression; large and stout, but with weak, helpless legs. He wears a neckcloth thicker than his head.’ And Charles Greville (*the* Greville diarist, younger brother of Henry Greville,

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already quoted, and one who has much to contribute to this book), brings him alive for us with a casual side-flick of his brilliant pen, showing him some years on, after William IV had inspected the Coldstream Guards. ‘They breakfasted and then went away, the Duke of Gloster bowing to the company while nobody was taking any notice of him or thinking about him.’



Prince William of  
Gloucester.

‘Nature must have been very merry when she made this prince,’ Greville added, ‘and in the sort of mood that great artists used to exhibit in their comical caricatures; I never saw a countenance which that line in Dryden’s *MacFlecknoe* would so well describe—

*“And lambent dulness plays around  
his face.”’*

With so little judgment and so much snobbery and conceit, one can understand this Duke’s casting an ambitious eye on the most eligible lady in the land—for he had aspired higher than Mary for a wife. He had first offered himself as a husband to the very heiress to the throne, Princess Charlotte herself, daughter

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of his cousin, the Prince Regent. In view of the contemporary descriptions of his person, to say nothing of his personality, it is a little surprising to find that choosy and self-willed young woman appearing to take his proposal seriously. Faced with this improbability some believed it a pretence, intended to hide her passing fancy for another Duke. An examination of her correspondence makes it clear, however, that she merely used him as a threat with which to ward off her father's efforts to marry her where he wanted. If he tried to force her to marry anyone, she declared, she would make a public declaration of her preference for Gloucester. It was a very effective threat.

‘What the P. said of him’, she wrote, ‘. . . was so excessively indecent that I hardly knew which way to look, and especially as he repeated it twice over.’

And when her bewildered father suggested that she must be ‘romantically in love’ with her cousin, she remarked, ‘That was so *very good* that I could not help smiling . . .’

Mary's brother, Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, was nervous that the marriage might come off. He wrote, when both Gloucester and the Prince of Orange were competing for the hand of the heiress to the throne, that he had been ‘very much afraid she would prefer the Cheese to the Orange!’

It was Leopold of Coburg, however, who carried off Princess Charlotte, and so Gloucester turned back to woo someone nearer his own age, size and weight—her Aunt Mary.

Yet that is not quite fair. Poor sweet Mary, though not sparkling herself, was well above Gloucester's intellectual level, and, though indiscreet, was never malicious. Above all, she was a social being. She surely deserved something better than an acknowledged half-wit, who was not only unattractive, but rumoured to be cruel as well.

Like her sisters, the beauty of the family may well have reconciled herself to a not very personable husband, and, like her two married sisters, she might well have settled down comfortably with some belated Fritz. She may have accepted with philosophy what Miss Harriet Martineau, writing one of her celebrated biographical sketches of the famous in the *Daily News*, when Mary, too, last of the sisters, died, was to call ‘the law-made incompatibility between royalty and the natural provision for the domestic affections’.

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But, Gloucester——!

Indeed there seems to have been great misgivings in the royal family, as well as in the heart of the bride herself.

No one would seriously hold a man's appearance, or, for the matter of that, his deficiencies in endowment or intellect, against him. To the English, bless them, these are usually endearing qualities. We love William IV because of, rather than in spite of, his idiocies. In William, though, these limitations went with a good and generous heart and an essential decency of outlook. Gloucester was quite another matter. Pompous, conceited, quarrelsome and unconciliatory, he had a nasty delight in hurting, and a way of bearing malice, which made him, to say the least of it, unlovable.

Mary, at any rate, did not hurry her marriage forward. She took some pleasure in the prospect of being a 'married Woman' but little in being married to Gloucester. Royal and Elizabeth had fled with all speed to their husbands' distant little realms, but Mary, who had only to move to another house in London, clung to her family.

'I have taken every opportunity of telling the Duke of Gloucester,' she wrote to the Prince Regent, 'how completely and entirely my happiness depends on my remaining on this blessed footing with you and all my family,' and she persuaded herself that all would be well on that score.

Some other matter troubled her, we do not know what, and after all the other parties involved had acquiesced in the marriage arrangements she still withheld her final agreement.

'The real truth is', she wrote to Lady Harcourt, 'that though the Q. and Prince gave their consent on Saturday, and felt satisfied all was settled, I was not so myself until last night, because I started a subject to the D. of Gloucester that required a very decided answer before I could make my mind up to change my situation. I got a satisfactory answer last night . . . therefore I can now say we compleatly understand one another.'

She adds the enlightening comment, 'I don't know what other people feel when going to be married, but as yet I have done nothing but cry.'

A great deal of crying went on at her wedding.

While she was dressing for the ceremony, and loading her arms with bracelets and her fingers with rings—her family's

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gifts—she took up one of the keepsake rings so popular at the time, containing the King’s hair. She cried, ‘poor soul, sadly as she put it on’, wrote an eye-witness of the scene, ‘and said “This I would not for the world omit. I have a superstitious dread of misfortune if I did.”’

There followed a very moist scene. When receiving the felicitations of the domestic staff, gathered to admire her and wish her well she broke down once more.

During the ceremony her old nurse kept calling out, ‘Poor child, poor dear child!’, and the nurse’s daughter wrote, ‘At one time I feared Pss Mary would have fainted; the Prince Regent was exceedingly affected, and had several times to have recourse to his pocket handkerchief. Then, Princess Elizabeth and Gloucester’s sister both wept audibly.’

Most weddings are weepy affairs, but not, perhaps, quite as weepy as was this one.

Even those not too closely concerned seemed to have been impressed with the atmosphere of disaster, and the Lord Chancellor wrote to his daughter that ‘Dear Princess Mary’s behaviour was so interesting and affecting that everybody was affected. Even the tears trickled down *my* cheeks; and as to Mamma she cried all night and nine-tenths part of the next day.’

It does seem that there must have been a general recognition that marriage to Gloucester was more easily to be regarded as a punishment than a pleasure. A little story current at the time speaks volumes, and tells far more than mere records of tears shed.

Some guests were talking in a corner of the crowded room, and in the midst of the ceremony, the Chief Justice, Lord Ellenborough, called out to quell them with the dire threat, ‘Do not make such a noise in that corner—if you do, you shall be married yourselves!’

The King’s ring was not to ward off misfortune in Princess Mary’s marriage. All forebodings were justified. It was an unhappy one.

Princess Charlotte, showing no signs of regretting her lost lover, gives us two glimpses of the early married life of the Gloucesters.

‘... I have seen the Glosters twice,’ she wrote on the 12th of August, 1816. ‘They seem very comfortable and happy. He is



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much in love and tells me he is the happiest creature upon earth. I won't say she does as much, but being her own mistress, having her own house, and being able to walk in the streets all delight her in their several ways.'

Again, in the September following, she wrote:

'The Duke seems very fond of Mary and to be very happy; he is certainly all attention to her, but I *cannot* say she looks the *picture of happiness* or as if she was much delighted with him.'

Soon his wife no longer even tried to pretend what she did not feel.

'You will be affected to hear', runs a passage in the famous *Creevey Papers*, which is supported by other evidence, 'that the dear Duchess of Gloucester is not happy, and that, tho' Slice is in politicks a radical, in domestic life he is a tyrant.'

The Duchess was patient, though now and then she did complain of the cruel manner in which he treated her, and few details of Gloucester's ill-usage of her have come down to us. But, as an example of his petty bullying ways, it seems certain that he locked up the drawing-room because it was not kept tidy enough, and kept the keys himself. All friends who wished to see her had to pant up to the top of the house, to be greeted by a very humiliated duchess.

'It is said the Duke of G—— torments the Duchess,' wrote kind-hearted Sir William Gell to his friend Lady Charlotte Bury, maid-of-honour to Princess Caroline of Wales, 'and makes her live up at the tip-top of the house, and treats her cavalierly. Now, being but an off-sprout of royalty, such manners are not seemly; but I have always remarked that these half-and-half people of blood, noble or royal, are peculiarly grand, and give themselves twice as many airs as the original roots and direct branches of the tree.'

Gloucester did not keep his promise to let his wife visit her family how, and when, and for as long as, she liked. Even to the King, her brother, she had to excuse him with the wry words, 'for Man is Man, and does not like to be put out of his way, and still less by a Wife than anybody else'.

When Gloucester died Princess Lieven wrote to Earl Grey—who had himself said, 'Well, if he dies, all I can say is, he won't leave a greater fool behind than himself!'—as follows:

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‘The news of the Duke of Gloucester’s death seemed to me at first rather like a weight taken off my chest—the poor man used to bore me so terribly . . . You will see the Duchess of Gloucester will now get perfectly well. There is nothing so bad for the health as small daily worries, and nothing so trying as continual ennui.’

Mary, who outlived her husband by twenty-three years, probably remembered him as something rather worse than a bore. ‘Many a painful meditation must she have had,’ wrote Miss Martineau in her newspaper obituary, ‘on that piece of enforced legislation of her father’s early and headstrong years.’ Then that lady proceeded to give her reflections on the Royal Marriages Act, now that the last of the family had died. They are not without interest for us.

The lesson their private lives had yielded, she warned, should not be neglected. ‘There was a strong hope that when our young Queen Victoria, who was at full liberty, a Sovereign, to please herself in marriage, had made her choice, this wretched and demoralizing Marriage Act, always reprobated by the wisest and best men of the time, would be repealed. There were then none left of the last generation who could be pointed at, or in any way affected, by such a repeal; and it was thought that it would be wise to do the thing before there was a new generation to introduce difficulty into the case. The opportunity has almost been allowed to slip from us . . .

‘Royalty will have quite difficulties enough to contend with, all through Europe, in coming times, without the perils consequent on this law. Its operation will expose all the intermarried royal families in Europe to criticism and ultimate rejection by people who will not be governed by a coterie of persons diseased in body through narrow intermarriage, enfeebled in mind,—strong only in their prejudices, and large only in their self-esteem and in their requirements.’

Miss Martineau cried out for repeal of the Act.

‘There is yet time to save the thrones of Europe—or at least the royal palaces of England—from the consequences of a collision between the great natural laws ordained by Providence, and the narrow and artificial law ordained by a wilful King of England. That King is in his grave, and the last of his children is now gone to join him there.

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‘Let the time be laid hold of to bury his evil work in the tomb which is now to be sealed over him and his for ever; and the act will be gratefully acknowledged by a long line of future princes and princesses, who will be spared the bitter suffering of those who have gone before.

‘It can never be, as was said by wise men eighty years ago, that royal personages who are declared of age at eighteen will have no will of their own, in such a matter as marriage, at five-and-twenty.’

These were forthright words and sentiments, even for Miss Martineau, even for the times. They would perhaps have shocked the lady whose death gave rise to them. But with Miss Martineau’s concluding sentence the gentle Mary would probably have been in sad agreement.

‘Marriage is too solemn and sacred a matter to be so treated as a piece of state politics: and the ordinance which is holy in the freedom of private life may be trusted with the domestic welfare of prince and peasant alike.’

## CHAPTER 14

### *Amelia*

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**T**he fifth princess was, of course, our own Sophia, whose story we shall consider later in detail, and the sixth was Princess Amelia.

The four sisters we have so far considered were all older than Sophia. The only sister younger than she had a 'heart-history'. (to borrow a phrase from Miss Martineau), which was even more tragic than hers.

Amelia, like Augusta, her elder by fifteen years, did not marry. Also like Augusta, she was deeply in love with a man not of royal birth, and it was her dearest wish to marry him. She suffered a fate infinitely more pathetic than her sister's, however. Augusta, at least, lived to be seen by the Countess of Granville at the age of fifty-two, good-humoured and jolly, 'stuffing *filets de sole* and veal cutlets'. Amelia died at twenty-seven of what her sisters were convinced was a 'broken heart'.

Amelia, King George III's youngest, and consequently his favourite, daughter, was sickly from birth. By the time she was fifteen tuberculosis had caused serious trouble in a knee. From then onwards she was always more or less of an invalid.

Like many sufferers from the disease, Amelia did not look the part. She was decidedly not frail, developing early, and looking seventeen when she was a mere fourteen or so. She grew to be a big girl, '*d'une taille prodigieuse*' at fifteen, according to her Swiss governess, apparently enjoying '*la plus belle santé*', with '*un air de force et de vigueur*'; and her sister Mary said that she promised to be 'very large indeed in time'. The fact that she was a good horsewoman helped to emphasize this impression of good health.

Amelia was no pining, doomed creature, either. She was naturally high-spirited and cheerful, perhaps as a result of the

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optimism which is often a noticeable accompaniment to the disease from which she suffered.

However, she was a sensitive girl, and even more markedly romantic than her sisters. They, desperately though they yearned for hearths and husbands of their own, had something down-to-earth about them, which saved them from the refinements of tragic suffering. Amelia was sentimental. Perhaps we read a forlorn, wistful look into her portraits, but there can be no imagination about the ringlets, the roses, and the ribbon bows which she affected, and which lend to her a look rather of Little Nell than of the imperious beauty of her period and status. In a court which despised novel writing she took a great interest in Fanny Burney's works, and on her very death-bed she was reading that most long-winded of serials with the most spurious of values, *Clarissa Harlowe*.

She returned her father's almost idolatrous love with fervour, and longed to pour out as much on a handsome lover of her own.

Amelia may have had more time for such day-dreamings than her sisters, for her education had been neglected, partly because of her ill-health, and partly because of the advice the doctors had given the Queen, which was to devote herself exclusively to the King. Royal, who had done her best as governess, had sailed away to Würtemberg to the sisters' obvious relief when Amelia was only fourteen. No doubt the princess, idle, sickly, pampered, and even spoiled by her father, ran a little wild, and learned to expect her own way in most things.

Fanny Burney has left us a well-known picture of her as she was recovering from an attack of illness, which it is perhaps worth quoting from here.

'The princess was seated on a sofa, in a French grey riding dress with pink lapels, her beautiful and richly flowing and shining fair locks unornamented. Her breakfast was still before her . . . and she received me with the brightest smile, calling me up to her and stopping my profound reverence by pouting out her sweet ruby lips for me to kiss.'

She had to be 'painfully lifted from her seat' on that occasion.

It was in 1801, a sad year in Princess Sophia's life and a bad one for the King her father also, when Amelia was nearly eighteen, that she was left alone at Weymouth after the rest of

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the family had gone back to Windsor. She was, as so often, unwell, and the idea was that she should enjoy the benefit of the regular exercise on horseback, and the sea air, for a little longer.

Miss Jane Gomm (one of the two formidable 'dragons', Miss Gomm of the heavy eyebrows and sharp face, and Miss Goldsworthy of the long nose) was left with her. Also with her was the King's A.D.C., one of his favourite equerries, Colonel the Hon. Sir Charles Fitz Roy.

Fitz Roy was the second son of the first Lord Southampton, and the nephew of the third Duke of Grafton. The King was very fond of him, and because he so often gave him precedence even over his sons, in order to have him near him, the equerry had been given the nickname of 'Prince Charles'. It was an ironical little coincidence, this bestowal on him of a royal Stuart title, for Fitz Roy was in fact a descendant of Charles II by his mistress Barbara Villiers.

The King had chosen a man he trusted to attend his favourite daughter.

Those few who have hitherto occupied themselves with Amelia's romance, with little to go by, have given us a muted picture of a quiet, rather chilly fellow, though they write with some uneasiness of his behaviour. Looking at an excellent miniature of him, I get an overwhelming impression of a weak, conceited courtier with an opportunist's eye, not intelligent enough to bend life to his own ends, but probably only too keen to make the most of anything that should happen to come his way. At this time, it happened to be Princess Amelia. For my part, I much prefer the bold, if absurd, Irishman, Brent Spencer.

However, I may be a little hard on the man with the big, soft, half-closed eyes, the thin face, the long nose and the little mouth, and there is no doubt that, whatever his hopes may have been, he had the worst of the bargain in this affair.

Whether we choose to call him loyal or dull, self-contained or frigid, sedate or wooden, unenterprising or weak, all agree that he was quiet, cautious, cold, approaching forty and susceptible to flattery.

All agree, too, that it was Charles Fitz Roy who was swept off by the romantic and resolute tubercular girl, and not she by

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him. Amelia later declared that she had loved him since she was sixteen, but the stay at Weymouth was probably the first opportunity for a prolonged association. The Hanoverians seemed to find the Stuarts quite irresistible. The King himself had loved Lady Sarah Lennox, also a descendant of Charles II; Prinny was infatuated with her nephew, Charles James Fox; and Amelia, like her father, was a victim of Charles Fitz Roy. When her brother, the Duke of Sussex, fell in love, he too chose a descendant of the Stuarts.

‘The behaviour of Fitz Roy when he realized—as he must have done on the return to Windsor if not before—that she was falling in love with him is hardly excusable,’ writes Miss Dorothy Margaret Stuart forthrightly. Even if he had fallen in love with her,’ she goes on, ‘it would have been wiser as well as more merciful on his part to throw up his post at Court and seek military employment abroad. Sir Brent Spencer, though his feelings towards Princess Augusta were evidently warmer than Fitz Roy’s for Amelia, had acted with greater credit to himself and with greater consideration towards the royal lady in question. But Fitz Roy remained cool and quiescent, even when Miss Gomm perceived how things were, even when Amelia openly dropped behind the rest of the royal ladies at Windsor in order to be with him, or sent fond glances towards him in church, thus making the situation perilously clear.’

Perhaps Fitz Roy expected the flattering passion to die out without costing him his pleasant position at Court. He was lukewarm enough, as is evident from the letters exchanged by the pair. Amelia writes to her ‘own dear angel’, in what seems an early letter, distraught with anxiety because he had not been her partner at the evening card session.

‘How cruel we did not play together. I always tell you honestly my opinion; therefore don’t be angry, but tell me the truth. I thought your manner to me still as if you had doubts about me. That dear smile today gave me such pleasure, but I think something I did annoyed you tonight. I own I was vexed and hurt at your manner when Mary came up, and I found you were out, whether from annoyance I don’t know; and by coming up again I thought I was *de trop*.

‘I tell you honestly, how jealous I am you don’t know! And I dread your hating me . . .

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'My own dear love, I am sure you love me as well as ever . . . I hoped yesterday, at latest last night, I should have heard from you. I dare say you had not time.'

Years later she put their relative situations clearly. Writing to him she said,

'O God, how I do love you! I have loved you from the first I sought you, and blessed be God—I gained you!'

The sharp Miss Gomm saw how things were, warned Amelia that she was playing with fire, and mentioned her fears to Princess Mary, who, of course, never could keep a secret. She shouted the news to the deaf Miss Goldsworthy and so everyone in earshot knew all about the affair.

Then Miss Gomm told the Queen, and Amelia, furious with everyone for 'underhand dealing', wrote to her mother.

In replying, the Queen, with adroit evasiveness, begged for peace; quiet, oblivion, tact and circumspection. She didn't want to know, wished she hadn't been told, was angry that the other princesses were in the secret, and tried to extort from Amelia a promise 'neither directly nor indirectly to name a word of this unpleasant business' to her brothers.

She would probably simply never have mentioned the matter to Amelia had not the angry princess actually written to her. Unbelievable as it may seem, she obviously never spoke of it to her when they met, though they lived under the same roof.

In a long letter her only direct comment on the main question raised is that 'to say anything upon that subject to the King would expose you more than anything, make him (I mean the King) unhappy, and make our home very unhappy, and as there is sufficient distress to be found out of doors there can be no good reason to be given why it should be unnecessarily increased within doors'.

It is the same story, always. The daughter has to reconcile herself to the threat that any furtherance of her affairs of the heart will drive her beloved father mad (make him 'unhappy') once more, for the third time in her memory. That third time, all feared, might be—as indeed it proved to be—the last. Thus Amelia had to take on herself the responsibility of driving a father incurably mad, and pushing a King from his throne, if she were to make a move to marry her Fitz Roy.

So everything went on as usual. Even Amelia's request,



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whether selfless or perverse, to give up her rides with Fitz Roy, was refused lest the King notice it.

Amelia herself was in a horrible situation. She loved her father devotedly; yet she must have realized that her only hope of marriage would be that he should either die or be pronounced incurably insane. The Honourable Mrs. George Villiers, her intimate friend and champion, declared that she refrained from eloping with Fitz Roy only from fear of the scandal which would ensue, and 'scatter the King's wits for ever'. Could she shut out from her mind the dreadful hope that her release might somehow come?

She never gave up hope of marrying her lover. 'Marry you, my own dear angel, I really must and will,' she wrote, and, 'I really must marry you; though inwardly united, and in reality that is much more than the ceremony, yet that ceremony must be a protection.' She told the Duke of York that she 'considered herself married'. She took to signing her letters to Fitz Roy as his 'wife', and to using the initials 'A.F.R.' for Amelia Fitz Roy. She even wrote to Fitz Roy himself, 'We are married. Every thought and every sorrow we must impart to each other.' She had the royal crown and cypher engraved on her silver over Charles Fitz Roy's monogram.

Some believed, Fitz Roy's own wife later on among them, that there had been some sort of a marriage ceremony performed, perhaps with the Regent's knowledge. Yet Mrs. George Villiers, probably closer to Amelia at the end than any other human being, was sure that nothing of the kind had taken place. Amelia herself often emphasized that though married in heart they were not '*in person*', and that, though she might call Fitz Roy her husband, 'alas! the rights, from situation, I have not enjoyed!'

A bombshell broke in October 1807, when Miss Gomm and Miss Goldsworthy, furious at anonymous letters accusing them of winking at the intrigue with Fitz Roy, accused the Queen of conniving at Princess Amelia's 'misconduct'. The Queen had, they declared, sanctioned the promise that the two could be married 'the moment the King was dead'.

Amelia, weeping in Mrs. Villiers's arms, said 'that she had long been engaged to marry him, and was determined to fulfil that engagement whenever the King died'.

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By then the attachment had lasted for at least nine years.

The Queen still called her daughter's love 'this unfortunate indulgence' and 'an impression which must make you miserable and be a disgrace to yourself, and a misery to all who love you'. She still begged her 'to subdue at once every passion in the beginning', still pleaded 'the melancholy situation of the King . . . who, could he be acquainted of what has passed would be rendered miserable for all his life'. Even her doctor tried to persuade her, 'for Jodeley's sake and her own situation' as princess, to bear her hardships patiently. Even Mrs. Villiers, perhaps the only living soul on Amelia's side in the matter, dissuaded her from a runaway 'marriage', on the grounds that 'such a shock as this would be to the King' might produce a return of his insanity.

'She was the most devoted and affectionate of daughters to him, and this touched her,' she recorded. 'She embraced me tenderly, told me I had conquered, and that she would not take this step, though she thought her life would be the sacrifice—as as indeed it proved to be.'

In 1808 (the same year in which negotiations were going on for the marriage between Princess Elizabeth and Louis Philippe which never came off) Mrs. Villiers obtained for Princess Amelia a copy of the full text of the Royal Marriages Act. Perhaps Amelia's heart was by then hardening towards her father. 'We don't know where to get at it,' Mrs. Villiers wrote, seeking it among some parliamentary records. 'It was made about the year 1771 or 2 or thereabouts. It is short and if you could find it I think you would perhaps be so very good as to copy it for me without telling anybody.'

When Amelia discovered that on attaining the age of twenty-five she would be entitled to notify the Privy Council through the Lord Chancellor of her wish and intention to marry Fitz Roy (now General Fitz Roy) she drafted one letter doing so, and another intended for the Prince of Wales. Perhaps, though, she never meant to use them during the lifetime of the King, for in the first draft she refers to George III as her 'late father'. People were never sanguine as to George III's expectation of life. By then he was growing blind and looking old. As it happened, he was to live many a long year after 1808—twelve years—but Amelia herself had only two more years left to her. It is with pity that we read her pathetic lines in these documents.

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'My being the youngest of so large a family takes off many objections . . . In the state the Continent is in, no settlement could happen there; besides, I would never marry where I could not give my affections, and General Fitz Roy possesses all my affection, and nothing can ever alter that; for years I have considered myself his lawful wife, though suffering all the trials of that without ever enjoying my rights.'

To Prinny she wrote that 'according to the Act made by my late father, I find I must inform you and the Privy Council through the Lord Chancellor to whom I have written to inform you of it, and I hope, as my whole comfort depends on this event, that you will not be my enemy.

'I have long considered myself as to what I now wish you to sanction, and I own I can never be happy or easy till I obtain it . . . and I am willing to give up family and everything to devote my life to that object of my affection, and for whom only I value my existence . . . neither comfort, happiness, nor health, but by marrying him can I obtain . . . Deceive you I never will, and I think it best to tell you I have delayed taking any step with him from his peculiar position [being an equerry] about my father, and not to hurt my father. That being removed, I feel it owing to myself to act decidedly . . .'

\* \* \*

It was not to be. The story of Amelia's increasing illness is a terrible one, made more horrible by accusations of the Queen's neglect and even positive cruelty. Amelia became convinced that the Queen did not wish her to get well, and Mrs. Villiers made the same charge against her sisters.

During Amelia's final illness, the King, already half-demented, visited her daily, received two-hourly reports of her condition, and questioned the doctors for two or three hours at a time.

Amelia, it is said, was anxious to reveal her love-affair to him. Everyone tried to dissuade her. Whether she ever did so or not, she did not spare the feelings of the poor, loving, unbalanced and grief-stricken monarch, who had come to console her and talk of Christ and the hereafter.

She ordered a jeweller to prepare a keepsake ring with all speed, and when the nearly blind King gropingly put out his

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hand to take hers at his daily three o'clock visit she slipped it silently on to his finger. In it was a lock of her hair under a crystal tablet, set in diamonds. 'Amelia' and 'Remember Me' were inscribed on it.

'Pray wear this for my sake,' Amelia asked her father, 'and I hope you will not forget me.'

'That I can never do!' cried the King, breaking down completely. 'You are engraved on my heart.'

Then, as he bent over her, she said again, 'Remember me, but do not grieve for me.'

Amelia, poor wretched girl, had always wrung the last drop of sentiment from every situation. This time she went too far.

Cold, cruel and selfish the Queen may have been, but she was right. This dreadful scene, added to the long grief and anxiety, was the final unbearable blow to the tortured King. His mind gave way again, and this time it was for ever.

It is easy to strain things too far, to over-sentimentalize like Amelia. The King might have gone mad again, even would probably have done so, without Amelia's last present, and Amelia would very likely have died of tuberculosis without her frustrated romance to hasten things on.

It is tempting, all the same, to see in the little tableau a simple allegory of revenge. The King may be said to have ruined Amelia's short life with his obsessions and his Marriages Act. Amelia drew him under with her as she died.

## CHAPTER 15

### *Love and the Prince*

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NO one after looking into the romantic histories of five of the princesses can marvel that the story of the sixth is one neither of peaceful marriage nor of contented spinsterhood.

Before going into details of Sophia's love-story, if such it was, it is of value to glance at that of yet another member of the family, this time a prince who 'married' in defiance of the Royal Marriages Act. I am not referring to the troublous affairs of Prinny and Mrs. Fitzherbert, all too familiar, and complicated by her being a Roman Catholic. It is the brother who was born in the year after the Act was passed, and four years before Sophia, to whom I am referring—Augustus, Duke of Sussex.

Augustus was the boy lying on the grass in the Benjamin West picture, apparently too delicate to stand for the tedious business of posing. He had suffered from asthma from his earliest years, and had to live abroad since the climate of England brought on attacks.

When he was only nineteen, on his travels in Italy with his Governor, he met and fell in love with Lady Augusta Murray. She was a daughter of the Countess of Dunmore, who was enjoying the gaieties of Rome while her husband was away governing one of the American provinces. Augusta was rather older than her Augustus, perhaps as much as six or seven years, but most of the men of this family preferred women older than themselves, and he pursued her relentlessly. According to him, he begged her to marry him without her family's knowledge, and she refused. This, he said, 'served only to add new fuel to a passion which already no earthly power could make me resign'.

Even Prinny never pursued his loves with more ardent protestations, and the prince insisted on writing the following emotional document, and signing it, as evidence of his sincerity.

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*'On my knees before God our Creator, I Augustus Frederick, promise thee, Augusta Murray, and swear upon the Bible, as I hope for salvation in the world to come, that I will take thee, Augusta Murray, for my WIFE, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, to love but thee only, and none other, and may God forget ME if I ever forget THEE! The Lord's name be praised! So bless me, so bless me, O God. And with my handwriting do I, Augustus Frederick this sign, March 21st, 1793, at Rome, and put my SEAL to it and my NAME.'*

More, the paper was headed by a further committal.

*'As this paper is to contain the mutual promise of marriage between Augustus Frederick and Augusta Murray, our mutual names must be put here by us both, and kept in my possession. It is a promise neither of us can break, and is made before God our Creator and all merciful Father.'*

The general impression is of a boy even younger than his years.

There was some difficulty about finding a clergyman of the English Church in Rome bold enough, or foolish enough, to defy the Royal Marriages Act and marry the couple in secret, for the prince intended no less. A clergyman called Gunn was found, but evidently showed signs of nervousness, for the prince told Augusta that he would press him to consent by urging that his honour was involved.

Augusta replied with some dignity, and great wisdom:

*'Then, my treasure, you say you will talk of honour to him. There is no honour in the case, if there is I will not marry you. I love you and I have reason to hope and believe that you love me, but honour in the sense you take it is out of the question.'*

*'I cannot bear to owe my happiness to anything but affection, and all promises, tho' sacred in our eyes and those of Heaven, shall not oblige you to do anything towards me that can in the least prejudice your future interests.'*

*'As for honour, with the meaning Mr. Gunn will annex to it, I am ashamed to fancy it, he will imagine I have been your mistress, and that humanity, commonly termed honour, now induces you to pity me, and so veil my follies by an honourable marriage . . .*

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'Tell the Gunn, my own Augustus, that you love me, that you are resolved to marry me, that you have pledged your sacred word. Tell him, if you please, that upon the Bible you have sworn it, that I have done the same, and nothing shall ever divide us. But don't let him imagine that I have been vile. Do this, my only love, but pray take care of the character of your wife, of your

AUGUSTA.'

On April 4, 1793, Augustus wrote to her in what, even allowing for the effusions of the day, seems real torment.

'Will you allow me to come to you this evening? It is my only hope. O let me come and we will send for Mr. Gunn! . . .

'More than forty-eight hours have I passed without the smallest nourishment. . . . Death is certainly better than this; which, if in forty-eight hours it has not taken place, must follow, for, by all that is holy, till when I am married, I will eat nothing; and if I am not to be married, the promise shall die with me! . . . If Gunn will not marry me, I will die . . . Good God! how I feel! . . . I am half dead. Good God, what will become of me? I shall go mad, most undoubtedly.'

The lady gave way, though still doubting the success of the step they were taking. The marriage contract was endorsed in the prince's own writing, 'Completed at Rome, on April 4, 1793.'

Lady Dunmore was told three months later.

The couple returned to England towards the winter. Fearing that the ceremony's having been performed in Rome might invalidate it, or be used to do so, quite apart from the hazards of the Royal Marriages Act, they went through another one at St. George's, Hanover Square. The banns were called for Augusta Murray, spinster, and Augustus Frederick, bachelor. Lady Harcourt heard that Lady Augusta told the clergyman that she had married a 'Mr. Frederick' in Italy, but as he was under-age she wanted to be remarried. 'It was, she added, a particular custom of their family where the lady was older.'

On January 13th a son was born. Lady Augusta foolishly betrayed her secret to the midwife, who talked; others noticed the curious entry in the register, the clerk was questioned, and the secret was out. It was only a matter of time before it reached the

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King. It must have evoked terrible memories of the secret marriages of his two brothers, Gloucester and Cumberland.

Augustus may have taken fright, for he left England suddenly on January 16th. A week later the Chamberlain, Lord Loughborough, had an audience of the King. He showed no mercy to his son. Angry and unbending, the King decided that the marriage should be set aside. The very next day the writ was applied for.

Lord Eldon, as one of the law officers under Lord Thurlow, gave an amusing account of some of the repercussions.

'It seemed singular the banns should be published when one of the parties was one of the royal family, and that the clergyman publishing the banns should not be struck upon the reading of the name.

'It appeared, however, that in the parish there were many of the name (I think Augustus Frederick) by which he was called in the publication.

'Then, great blame was imputed to the rector for publishing the banns without inquiry as to the residence of the parties in the parish. So it was proposed to call upon the clergy of the church, St. George's, Hanover Square, to account for the marriage having taken place by banns, without the proper residence of the party in the parish, and without their knowing the parties.

'The rector first appeared. He said he had two most respectable curates, and he had always most solemnly explained them not to marry parties without having first enquired about their residence.

'The curates were then examined, and they said theirs was a most respectable parish clerk, who wore a gown, and they had always most solemnly given a like injunction to him.

'The clerk was then called, and he declared no man in the parish had a more excellent careful wife than he had, and that he daily gave her most solemnly a like injunction.

'She then made her appearance, and said that she must sometimes be about her own, and not about parish, business; but that she had two female servants, as discreet as any in the parish, and she had always given them a like solemn injunction, when anybody brought a paper about publication of banns in her and her husband's absence, to make proper enquiries about the parties' residence.'

So everyone passed the buck, and no one was to blame.



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More important was what followed, for Lord Thurlow raised the question of the penalties of *præmunire*—penalties, we may recall, which Parliament had been assured, and by him, were ‘only *in terrorem*’. Lord Eldon goes on:

‘All this put Lord Thurlow out of humour, and he then said to me angrily, “Sir, why have you not prosecuted under the Act of Parliament, all the parties concerned in this abominable marriage?”’

‘To which I answered “That it was a very difficult business to prosecute; that the Act, it was understood, had been drawn by Lord Mansfield and *Mr. Attorney-General Thurlow* and *Mr. Solicitor-General Wedderburn*, and unluckily they had made all parties present at the marriage guilty of felony; and as nobody could prove the marriage except a person who had been present at it, there could be no prosecution, because nobody present could be compelled to be a witness.”’

‘This put an end to the matter.’

So Thurlow, the intimidator, was nicely hoist, and the law, or at any rate, the Act, shown to be an ass. No one could be compelled to give evidence which would incriminate himself.

Notwithstanding all this, the marriage was annulled. A decree was pronounced by Sir W. Wynne, Dean of the Arches, declaring that in respect to the first marriage, ‘or rather show and effigy of marriage, had, or solemnised, or pretended to be had and solemnised’ at Rome, ‘there is not sufficient proof by witnesses that any such act, or rather show and effigy was had’.

Augustus was furious, insisting that the lawsuit had been begun immediately after he had left England in January 1794; that it had been conducted with great inhumanity; that his wife, ‘defenceless in the absence of her husband’, had been persecuted on the second day after she had been brought to bed; and that it was ‘not only not sanctioned by the laws of our country, but even in defiance of them’. An attempt had even been made to gain the co-operation of his wife by offering a bribe of ‘a provision from the crown’ if she did not press her claims.

This bride, we might note, was no Anne Horton, whose reputation was foul though her birth was respectable, nor again a Maria Waldegrave, whose dignity and charm were as nothing in the face of her illegitimacy. This was a young English (or rather Scottish) woman of good family and excellent reputation,

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one who, moreover, shared common royal ancestors with her Augustus in no fewer than three different lines of descent.

Augustus wrote to the King, begging to be allowed to abandon his rights to the succession, and to become merely a private gentleman and the husband of his wife. This was rejected with scorn.

Alas! as too often in his family, Augustus's loyal, chivalrous and vehement wooing led only in the end to betrayal. The Duke of Gloucester, his uncle, had abandoned his Maria Waldegrave (whom he had pursued so ardently and championed so boldly when the marriage was questioned), and Sussex was eventually to do the same to his once beloved 'Goosey'. At least he did not re-marry until after her death, which seemed to imply his continued belief in the validity of their marriage. (Oddly enough, he 'married' for the second time, one Cecilia Buggin, later created Duchess of Inverness, in the same unorthodox fashion.) By 1804 Augusta was reduced to applying to the Court of Chancery for a payment of £4,000 a year from the Duke's annuity, which had been settled on her for the support and education of her children. By 1809 the Duke was bickering in public about her bringing up their two children with the idea that 'they were princes and princesses'.

For years the son of the marriage, known as Augustus D'Este (the name taken from common Italian ancestors of his father and mother) would try to obtain recognition, even filing a bill in Chancery in 1831, the year after his mother's death, in which he tried to prove the marriage and 'perpetuate the testimony of the clergyman', who was then over eighty years of age. Counsel would give their opinion that:

(a) The Royal Marriages Act did not extend to marriages contracted outside Great Britain.

(b) The Roman marriage could have been sustained.

(c) 'It would be very dangerous for the son and daughter of the marriage, viz. Sir Augustus D'Este and his sister, to contract a marriage without complying with the requisitions of the Royal Marriages Act, or without giving notice to the Crown.'

In fact, counsel were of opinion, in Mr. O'Connell's words, that the 'status of Sir Augustus and his sister was that of a prince and princess of the blood royal in England, and that as regards the kingdom of Ireland it was a true marriage'.

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The affair drew attention, if nothing else, to various anomalies. For instance, the children of the marriage were bastards in England, but legitimate in Hanover, and in the succession for the throne. Perhaps it was because of such anomalies that the King in 1804 had granted Lady Augusta the licence to assume the title of Comtesse d'Ameland.

Such ameliorations were poor consolation, however. The marriage had been annulled, and was seen to be so. A gallant effort to defy the Royal Marriages Act had been a failure. The King had had his way in the first case brought under it. It was a lesson apparent to all the royal family, both princes and princesses. Any one of them who had already been a party to a secret 'marriage' ceremony, or proposed to do so in the future, could be in no doubt whatsoever that legally it was a mockery.



PART V

*Sophia*



## CHAPTER 16

### *Poor Sophy*

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After following the histories of five of the six daughters of George III, and seeing how consistently their hopes of youthful and fitting marriages were blighted, we shall not be astonished to find the sixth daughter, Princess Sophia, deprived of that marriage, both royal and respectable, at a suitable age, which she might reasonably have expected to be her due.

Naturally the girl Sophia could not foresee the full course of each of her five sisters' lives, but she was the youngest daughter but one, and she had ample time in which to observe as she grew up her father's unnatural attitude to their marrying. It was not until Sophia herself was nearly twenty that Royal, the eldest, had made her escape, and Sophia could hardly have been ignorant of the desperate state into which that princess had fallen when she realized that she might never have a mate. Perhaps, also, the other three young women who stood in age between Royal and herself reflected their elder sister's feelings, at least to some extent.

For Sophia, too, there must have been the daunting realization that those elder sisters, if they married at all, would probably be given away in strict succession, which left her a long way down the list. The sentiments in Amelia's draft letter concerning the dearth of Protestant princes, the state of Europe, and the improbability of her ever coming to the throne must have been echoed in Sophia's heart. She too must have asked herself why she might not find herself an English lover, or permit him to find her, and marry him.

But what was the Princess Sophia, heiress to all these problems, like?

Sophia at twenty-one was enchanting. She was, even by more exacting plebeian standards, a very pretty girl, and many have

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called her beautiful. Mary may have been the beauty of the family, but Sophia was a close second. They were the only two princesses who were naturally slender and delicately made. They had an elegance lacking in their more sturdy sisters. Marianne Moula, the Swiss governess, whose wicked pen had not spared the other princesses, was quite melting towards Sophia, her favourite. She found that, though her features were the least good, her face was 'the most elegante'. '*Sophie qui de tout a été ma favorite est la moins douce . . . elle est la moins bien pour les traits, mais la plus elegante pour la figure . . .*' We can see from miniatures today how appealing must have been that fine-drawn face with the particularly large, full eyes of the vivid family blue. Perhaps it would be even more highly rated today, when classical beauty is not so inevitably the touchstone as formerly.

Sophia, unlike Mary, had a good deal besides looks and amiability to commend her. She was by far the cleverest of the sisters, and had a very individual, if perhaps rather odd, personality. Lord Melbourne once said to Queen Victoria that he had always thought Princess Sophia 'very pretty, though very like a gipsy'. As Sophia was fair, the susceptible peer was probably referring to her gaiety, and the possibly rather tense vitality for which she was remarkable. Or he may have been referring to a quality in her perhaps best described by the word bizarre. Melbourne liked a touch of the raffish and the eager in women.

Sophia was the reverse of stolid. She had, the same governess recorded, in August 1798, when Sophia was not yet twenty-one, more sensibility, energy and imagination than all the other sisters put together, or, to quote exactly, '*elle a plus de sensibilité, d'énergie, d'imagination que toutes les autres ensemble . . .*' Like Ernest, her brother, she had a bent towards satire. With a gift for the *mot juste*, her talent for mimicry, and a teasing streak, she comes to us as a lively, entertaining, and possibly rather naughty, little creature in youth. Sophia was always kind, however. Perhaps kindness was the salient quality in her nature, and it grew only more noticeable with the years, and despite the various blows which life was to deal her.

From childhood days she had made friends easily. Obviously she was always as anxious to spare the feelings of the innocent and unpretentious as she had been to keep Mr. Webb from



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embarrassment about his large nose. She was a general favourite—her governess, Prinny, William, Duke of Clarence, Edward, Duke of Kent, and the Duke of York all went out of their way to use the word concerning her. Queen Victoria, her niece, was very fond of her. Her letters, merry, witty, observant, and tactful, explain a little of her popularity, and we are fortunate enough to be able to see her through the eyes of that perhaps rather emotional and extreme, but neither unperceptive nor stupid, young person, that other niece of hers, who knew her before she grew old, Princess Charlotte.

The sixteen-year-old princess writes to her bosom friend, Miss Mercer Elphinstone, from whom she has been forcibly parted, from the Lower Lodge, Windsor, in October 1812:

‘As you mention Sophia, I must indeed say to you how thoroughly amiable and what a true friend she is, and how entirely she is to be depended upon. When I see her with the rest of her family, I can hardly believe she belongs to them—so wholly different as she is [*sic*] in thoughts, opinions, manners. Indeed I should be very ungrateful if I were not to feel her constant kindness to me. What I feel *particularly* forcibly is her silent and active kindness *about you* . . . Her nobleness and rectitude of mind renders her no favourite here. The constant scenes of intrigue, of tracasseries, she can but ill support; as there never is any change of scene, added to the situation of the King, who she adored, and who loved her dearly, makes her sick, and her health is impaired by her acute feelings, not for herself but those she loves. She never omits the smallest opportunity, when it lays in her power, of doing what is kind by me, or some attention. I know what passes at the Castle thro’ her, she has often fought my battles for me; she is a great comfort to me . . . were it not for her I know not what I should do, what would become of me. It is extremely distressing to see how she suffers, and with such patience.’

Sophia was always delicate, and the letters of those who loved her are full of anguish for her sufferings. As a child she was subject to frequent attacks of faintness, and some ailment which affected her throat so that it was painful to swallow, and left her too shaky to write legibly. Throughout her life she had ‘cramps’, ‘spasms’, ‘faintings’ and ‘pain in the side’—all frequent in the royal family. Perhaps her health had something to do with her

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depression Mlle Moula noted, saying of her that she had '*des nerfs irritables*' and that she was '*sujette aux low sperits* [*sic*]'. Perhaps it also accounted for the other remark by her governess, that she was 'the least *douce*' of the sisters.

Perhaps it was because of her health, too, that Sophia was usually referred to by such loving and pitying terms—she is often Poor Sophy, Little Sophy, Madam Little, Sweet Sophy. Even the brothers, so good at riding roughshod over the feelings of others, spoke tenderly, like Princess Charlotte, of 'her weak and worn out delicate little frame', and prepared their minds, as she did, for 'her not being long lived, both from her tender and dwindling state; besides which her sensitive mind and exquisite feeling must have had too many death blows for her spirits or her health ever to recover'.

It was in 1814 that Sophia's physician told Princess Charlotte that her illness was incurable, 'that it was endless, that hers and Amelia's sickness were precisely the *same*, though not originating from the *same* causes as Amelia's did', and left Charlotte 'quite oppressed and unhappy about that amiable little being'.

Yet Sophia was to outlive most of her solicitous near relations—Charlotte herself had then only three years to live—and survive to the age of seventy-one.

Charlotte, at any rate, believed Sophia to be 'a right-hearted and right-minded person', and one 'who I could trust with my life, I know'. In one sentence she summed up the impression Sophia seemed to make on most people—even on her sisters, despite Charlotte's assertion of their jealousy. 'She is a very sweet dear, being so true to me, so sencible [*sic*], so right on all subjects.'

It was this princess who was involved in a romantic tragedy, which grew into something more horrible. Like her sisters, Sophia suffered from her enforced spinsterhood. Like them all, she was desired. Unlike them—as I think we may say with some confidence—she bore a child. She died, officially at least, unmarried.

Let us put together her story as best we can from the available records.

As early as 1801 Sylvester Douglas, Lord Glenbervie, was writing of 'Princess Sophia's extraordinary illness at Weymouth last Autumn.'

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Lord Glenbervie was a plodding, rather narrow-minded, very inquisitive, but essentially moral, Scotsman, who married a daughter of Lord North's, and thereby ensured his fortune. His wife (and her sister, Lady Sheffield) attended Caroline, Princess of Wales, and, of course, as her father's daughter, knew everybody. Princess Caroline found the Glenbervies good company, for he was 'as gay as a lark', and she was witty and good-natured. She called them '*mes meilleurs amis*', and poured into their not unwilling ears a stream of stories about her detested royal in-laws. She was prejudiced, malicious, and not always truthful, we know, but she was also often in a privileged position to know the truth, and it is always possible that she may have sometimes chosen to speak it. So, with whatever reservations we feel necessary, the evidence of the Glenbervies should be heard.

On February 12, 1804, Glenbervie wrote in his journal: 'The foundling which was left at the Taylors' at Weymouth, about two years ago, is now in a manner admitted by the people about the Court to be the Princess Sophia's, and, as the story generally goes, by General Garth, one of the King's equerries and a very plain man, with an ugly claret mark on his face. He has taken it from the Taylors and openly maintains it . . . It is now said the Queen knows the child to be the Princess Sophia's, but that the King does not, but that the Queen thinks Garth the father.'

'The Taylors' refers, we may assume, because of the spelling and the capital letter (a tailor was also involved), to the establishment of Sir Herbert Taylor. 'This loyal officer', to quote Fitzgerald, '. . . was one of those confidential servants and friends which are often found in Courts, and are invaluable to their employers. Such have tact and a rare discretion; they save their royal principal from many a mistake.'

Lieutenant-General Sir Herbert Taylor (as he became) had been appointed private secretary to the Duke of York in 1794 when he was only nineteen. Eleven years later he would fulfil the same office to the King, and afterwards to Queen Charlotte, and to William IV. Many, including her son Ernest, feared his enormous influence over the Queen. He was generally agreed however, to be a man not only of pleasant, kindly manners and notable intelligence, but of undoubted integrity. He was soon more than a loyal servant to the royal family, one who could be

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trusted to keep silent and inactive where necessary, and to fight hard in their interests when boldness and action were called for. He was an intimate friend, and an agent to be trusted in the most delicate affairs. When the day came that he considered publishing his memoirs he wrote that he was aware that there were people who would want him to divulge the details of 'scandal of various descriptions', but that 'although I may possess the means, I have not the inclination to meet the expectations of the latter'; and he destroyed 'injurious documents'.

On November 4, 1810, Lord Glenbervie, after recording the Princess of Wales' assertion that the Duke of Kent had told her that the father of the child was not Garth, wrote: 'The boy is now nine years old, and, as the Princess says, most strikingly like the royal family. He is at school, and was only at Datchet [within easy distance of Windsor] this summer for a visit. General Garth acknowledges him, and Miss Garth [his niece] seems proud of the supposed royal connection.'

'The Princess of Wales', Glenbervie also noted, 'thinks the Princess Sophia was so ignorant and innocent as really not to know till the last moment that she was with child. This corresponds with what Mrs. Sneyd told Lady Glenbervie. Yet she and everybody says the Princess Sophia is very clever. I asked the Princess of Wales if she thought it possible that she did not perceive something particular had passed, and if she could think it a matter as indifferent and as unlikely to have consequences as blowing her nose.'

It is worthy of note that the usually caustic and uncharitable Princess Caroline should have given this opinion of Sophia's innocence. Another lady (and one who was usually a more kindly judge), thought otherwise. She was Mrs. George Villiers, Princess Amelia's close friend, and she wrote to her daughter, 'At first my *intimacy* was chiefly with the Princess Sophia, who seemed to place the most unbounded confidence in me and excited my sympathy and compassion to an unbounded degree in return, as I thought her more sinned against than sinning. My general impression of her character was much changed afterwards, as you know.'

Which of the two pictures represents the true Sophia? And where do we place the unedifying story, also from Glenbervie, about the alleged crudity of attitude and speech of the royal

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sisters concerning such matters? It was a very strange family, he wrote in 1804, 'at least the children, sons and daughters'.

'For instance,' he went on, 'Lady Sheffield was in attendance at Blackheath a few days ago, when the Queen with the Princesses Elizabeth and Sophia paid a morning visit to the Princess of Wales. While she [Lady Sheffield] was waiting with the two daughters, the Queen and the Princess of Wales having retired into another room, the Princess Elizabeth, after some common enquiries about Mrs. (Patty) Vernon, said, "Lady Sheffield, do you really believe her to be a virgin?" (They had been before laughing at the stiffness and apparent prudery of the sister, Lady Harcourt.) "Most certainly, Madam." Then says the Princess Elizabeth turning to her sister, "You know, Sophy, I always say I do not believe there is such a thing as a woman being a virgin, unless she stuff herself with lead!" The coarse, vulgar, stupid indecency of this speech shocked Lady Sheffield not a little.'

When considering the story of Sophia's having borne an illegitimate child, we should not forget that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was hardly safe for a woman in the public eye to retire to bed with a headache for half an hour during the daytime. She was likely to be at once accused of having been brought to bed of an unwanted child. Thirty years after Lady Sarah had broken her leg at the time of her romance with the King, she was still chafing at the 'laughable idea' that the accident 'was a sham!', and that she had in reality been delivered of a son by a great personage. Popular gossip could even put a name to that 'son', the Hon. & Rev. Charles Redlynch Fox-Strangways, third son of her relation the Earl of Ilchester, since he had conveniently been born in the appropriate year in her own family.

Most, if not all, of these princesses were at one time or another accused of having borne illegitimate children under the guise of illness. Princess Elizabeth was often called 'Mrs. Ramus', and the chest complaints and 'spasms' which occasionally confined her to a little house by Kew Green during the long years before her marriage at the age of forty-eight were firmly believed to represent so many babies by Billy Ramus, an obscure member of the royal household. Amelia has been accused of having died in childbirth, bearing, by some accounts, twins. Prinny's wife, the Princess Caroline of Wales, was notoriously

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supposed to have borne several of the children whom she 'adopted'.

Glenbervie himself, while writing down rumours concerning Princess Elizabeth's adventures (with full complement of sedan chairs, thick veils, and mysterious accoucheurs) exclaims, 'Is all this really true? It is so like many stories that one has heard!' Then he adds, 'But that such things have happened is almost certain, and they probably have happened and will happen, not once or twice, but over and over again.'

In view of all this one might well have expected the scorn of historians today to be poured out on the mere suggestion that the Princess Sophia, too, had a child born out of wedlock. All the more might this be so seeing that the news comes to us on the questionable authority of Lord Glenbervie and that his chief informant was Prinny's embittered wife.

However, scholars and historians, no matter how regretfully, accept the fact of the birth of a child (who could not have been other than illegitimate) to the Princess Sophia, and date this occurrence in the late summer of the year 1800. They also accept that he went under the name of Thomas Garth, and they admit that they do not know for certain who his father was. The fact that the birth of the child to Sophia was to be referred to so confidently and openly in the press, and without the royal family's taking any steps to punish the offenders, suggests that the outspoken ones must have felt sure of their ground, at least as far as the mother of the child went.

Perhaps Glenbervie had stumbled on the right explanation of the affair when he wrote:

'The Princess [of Wales] says it is now an established maxim with her sisters-in-law (I think she meant to except Princess Mary) that as the King has told them he would never permit any of them to marry, they may indulge themselves in the gratifications of matrimony, if they manage matters with prudence and decorum, and form attachments as near to conjugal connection as the restriction imposed on them will admit of.'

Sophia's own attitude, as shown in her letters to Lady Harcourt, seems hardly a brassy one, and Glenbervie himself commented in 1810: 'The Princess Sophia, if a sinner, has the demeanour of a very humble and repentant one. She has something very attentive and kind and even affectionate in her demeanour.'

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Whether modest or coarse, innocent or guilty, bold or furtive as to her character and attitude, then, we may take it that the Princess Sophia bore an illegitimate child in the year 1800.

On Wednesday, March 18th, 1829, the *Morning Chronicle* printed a letter from a correspondent who apparently felt qualified to give some pretty exact details about the affair. It was published under the heading, 'Some Particulars Respecting the Birth and Education of Captain Garth', and ran as follows:

'In the summer season, about seven and twenty years ago, when his late Majesty was about to make his usual migration from Windsor to Weymouth, the Princess Sophia, then about twenty-five years of age, was in very indifferent health, in so much that it became necessary for the party which left the Castle the first day, and which consisted of the Princesses Mary, Elizabeth and Sophia, attended by the late Generals Gwynne and Goldsworthy, and General Garth, to rest at Andover for the night, instead of making the journey in a single day, as was usual with the royal parties on such occasions, and when they arrived at the royal residence at Weymouth, the Princess was so exhausted that it became necessary for her Royal Highness to be carried upstairs in the arms of her attendants.

'Soon after this it happened that the wife of a tailor, named Sharland, living on the Esplanade, at Weymouth, was one day delivered of a son, and was doing well after her travail under the care of Mr. Beaver, an accoucheur of the same place; but, about three o'clock the next morning, that gentleman returned to the tailor's house with another fine boy in his arms, and soon afterwards the nurse was called and informed that her mistress had made her husband doubly happy by presenting him with a second son, twin to the first. The old lady was said to be somewhat doubtful about the reality of this circumstance, but there was little difficulty in persuading her to do her duty to the little new-comer, notwithstanding that there was much discussion among the gossips about the skirt of a magnificent dress which was said to have been the clothing of the young stranger when delivered out of the arms of the surgeon.

'On the morning after this strange affair occurred at the house of the tailor, it was announced to the Queen by Lady Cathcart and Lady Charlotte Bruce, who had been in attendance upon the Princess Sophia during the night, that a great change had taken

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place in the state of her Royal Highness, in the course of that period, and that the medical attendant had declared that there was now every prospect that her Royal Highness would be completely restored to health after a short period of rest and quiet retirement. In fact, her Royal Highness did recover so fast from this time, that there being a grand route at Lady Caroline Damer's, at Kame, about a month after, she was able to go there in a close carriage, and make her first appearance in public since her arrival at Weymouth.

'In the mean time, the story of the silk skirt marked with a coronet, and the mysterious arrival of the young hero whose envelope it formed, was buzzed about the town, and the tailor acquired no small accession of trade and consequence, through the numerous visits of the nobility and gentry, who made an order for a riding-habit or a new suit of clothes a pretext for gratifying their curiosity, by inquiries relative to the tales then in circulation, and by obtaining a sight of the subject of all the small-talk of the then fashionable watering-place.

'In short, the tailor was raised so much above his level in the scale of importance, that he went about boasting everywhere of the great charge committed to his care, and at length went to General Garth, then about fifty-six years of age, and living at Stinsford, close to Dorchester, in the house previously occupied by Lady Susan O'Brien [the married name of Lady Sarah Lennox's friend and correspondent], who supplied the funds for the maintenance of the infant, and required to know who were its real parents, in order that he might consult directly with them respecting its welfare.

'This conduct, of course, led to the removal of the child into other hands, and the wife of a serjeant in the Scots' Greys was hired to nurse it at the General's own house, and became its second foster-mother. It was not long before the Greys were ordered on foreign service, and the serjeant's wife following the fortunes of her husband, young Tom Garth (for so he was soon afterwards called) was sent to Mrs. Conyngham's, at Piddletown (where General Garth now lives), to be nursed by one of the female domestics of that lady.

'Our youthful hero thrive apace, and soon began to echo the many inquiries made of him, by putting such questions to the General as "Who are my mama and papa?" to which the



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General would frequently reply, "My dear, your mama is not here; but I am your papa." At other times the General would draw a miniature from his bosom, and say, "There, my love—kiss that—that is your mama."

'It may easily be imagined that the youngster, of so mysterious an origin, was spared no indulgence that the wealth and rank of his protectors could procure, and, as might naturally be expected, he quickly began to play "h-l and Tommy" (or "h-l and Jemmy", as a noble and learned lord, now the intimate friend and adviser of an illustrious person whose name has lately been connected with this history [probably Lord Eldon, who was of humble origin] once called it) all round the country; and, at eight years of age, the future driver of the barouche and four might be seen driving six goats in an open phaeton into Dorchester, threatening to break his own neck and every one's else that came in his way.

'It will be readily believed that at the period of the birth of this now prominent personage, whose recent adventures it is not necessary to recount, there were many speculations in the locality of Weymouth as to his real parentage, and though all who were acquainted with any part of his secret history were agreed about his maternal origin, yet still, considering the disparity of years and other circumstances, between the lady and the gallant officer, to whom she is now said to have been united by the forms of marriage, it was thought that the paternal adoption was but assumed by the latter, and the private correspondence by letter, which was known to be carried on between the parties at this time,<sup>1</sup> might be accounted for on other suppositions; but it is not recollected that the name of the personage now called in question by public rumour, was ever at that time hinted at. Among the names fixed upon at the time was that of a gallant sea commander, then in high favour with His late Majesty (Sir H. B. N——).'

For many years that was perhaps the most authoritative-seeming account of the birth and education of Tom Garth available to us. However, of recent years there have been important additions to our knowledge. In 1945 there appeared a little book of memoirs, an autobiographical fragment entitled *Elizabeth*

<sup>1</sup> Letters were brought from the Princess by the royal pages with strict orders that they should be delivered to the General himself.

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*Ham by Herself*, 1783-1820, which seems to corroborate much of what the anonymous newspaper correspondent had to say, and affords us an insight into how the ordinary citizen of the day received the story. Miss Ham, writing as an old lady, says:

'It must have been soon after I left school, when I could not have been more than fourteen [*sic*, ? seventeen] that the good people of Weymouth were furnished with a delightful story for scandalous gossip. There was a tailor of the name of Sharland, whose wife was confined, and the medical gentleman, a Mr. Bevan, who attended her, sent the monthly nurse away on some distant errand. When the woman returned she found two babies where she had left only one. She questioned Mrs. Sharland, who told her another had been born after she left. But the nurse was not to be so deceived. She insisted on knowing the truth, and the poor woman, weak in mind as well as body, told her that a few minutes after she had left the house a carriage stopped at the door and the doctor brought a new born infant and placed it by her side, with a purse of money, and told her she must say it was her own. The nurse was under no obligation to keep the secret, and so she had the pleasure of frustrating the well-laid and, so far, well-conducted, plan for concealment.

'Of course, every kind of conjecture was afloat. Among other things it was said that an invalid *midshipman* had been landed from one of the frigates under suspicious circumstances. It was about a fortnight after the royal family had come for the season, and, according to custom, there were aunts and other visitors staying at our house. I was listening to all these discussions going on, and, of course, saying nothing. When the conversation had ceased for a minute, I looked up from my work and said, "I wonder what is the reason that the Princess Sophia has never been seen out since the Family came? Upon this the whole party burst into a laugh, for it was very evident that everybody had been thinking the same thing, but had deemed it high treason to give it utterance. In general, if one of the princesses happened to have a cold there was fuss enough made about it. But not a word had been said about the seclusion of the Princess Sophia.

'It was generally received opinion at this time that several of the princesses were privately married. I was just of the age to fabricate romances out of passing events, and here was something on which to exercise my fancy. I remember being sent to

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Sharland's shop on some errand about a fortnight after all this talk. There was no one in the shop when I went in, but the door of a small parlour was open, and in it was sitting Mrs Sharland wrapped up in shawls with a cradle by her side. I went to tell her what I wanted, and then looked at the infant in the cradle, and, stooping to kiss it, I enquired if this were her own child or the little foundling, she told me it was the latter. Then I gazed on it with great interest, for I felt quite sure it was to turn out a hero.

'The reappearance of the Princess Sophia was, of course, watched for with great interest. She was observed to be looking very delicate, and was always leaning on the arm of the Duke of Cumberland. I watched them one day on their return from a morning call on Lady Paulett. This pair were behind the rest of the royal family and their attendants. As they passed the tailor's door, a woman came to it with a child in her arms. They paused a few seconds, gazed earnestly at the child, and then passed on. Her brother must know of her marriage, and is the friend of her husband, thought I. But I was soon obliged to weave another framework for my romance. If we were out walking on the Esplanade at the time, we generally went to see the royal family land after their sailing excursion. One evening, a short time after this, I was on the pier. The King and Queen had stepped over the carpeted plank and ascended the steps in due form, when the Duke of Cumberland, who had not been of the sailing party, darted into the boat, seized on the Princess Sophia and kissed her, and then drew her arm through his and conducted her on shore. From that time the Duke of Cumberland was not really the son of the King and Queen, but of some foreign potentate, who, for some political reasons, they had brought up as their own, but he knew all about it. He was too old to be the lost Dauphin, but he might be an elder brother.

'Whoever were the parents of the child, they took no notice of him for some years. His foster parents had him christened, with their own child, and gave him the name of Thomas. When he was four or five years old he was taken by General Garth, and brought up as his son. Many people thought he really was so, but if a fair young princess was his mother, of which there was little doubt, is it likely that a little old man with a clarety countenance would be the object of her secret affections? But the

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truth connected with this shocking story has been before the public within the last ten years. The son was as profligate in his life as his birth might have indicated. The last time I saw "Tom Garth", as he was called, he was about fifteen, riding out hunting on a pony, in a scarlet coat.'

It is clear that Miss Ham did not give any more credence to the explanation that General Garth was Tommy Garth's true father than our newspaper correspondent, and that she went further in being willing to lend ear to the scandalous Cumberland legend. Yet it could be maintained that Cumberland's behaviour as she describes it seems more like that of transparent innocence than of guilt exposed.

An examination of the parish registers of St. Mary's, Melcombe Regis, Weymouth, yields two entries which seem to lend some substance to the story given in these two accounts.

The first one runs:

'Thomas Ward, a stranger, adopted by Samuel and Charlotte Sharland. Born 5 August, 1800. Baptised 14 August, 1800.'

The name Ward is, of course, a variant of Garth, the letters *gu* and *w* being etymologically interchangeable in such synonyms as, for instance, warden and guardian, warranty and guarantee, wage and gauge.

Two years later, in December, 1802, the baptism is again recorded of Thomas Ward, son of Samuel and Charlotte Sharland.

The reactions of the Rev. Mr. M. H. Garner, the present Rector of Melcombe Regis, on my asking him, without troubling him with details of the purpose behind my enquiries, to be so kind as to confirm the exact wording of these entries is worth noting.

'I cannot imagine why there should have been a second baptism of the child,' the Rector wrote to me. 'As there evidently was, unless those who were in charge of him in 1802 were not the same as his guardians in 1800, and presumed his baptism had been neglected, and had no means of ascertaining whether that was so or not. One could pardon the Rector, William Gorton, for not remembering whether he had baptised a child of that name before or not, as there had been 225 baptisms in between. But it is strange that those responsible in 1802 did not think of enquiring, unless they did not wish to be linked up with the happenings of 1800.'

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If Sharland, gentleman's tailor and Colonel of Volunteers, was out of favour because of his presumptuous and overweening behaviour, and the child had been removed from his care, it may well be that Sir Herbert Taylor or General Garth, or both, preferred to risk the possibility of baptism being performed a second time rather than ask for information from the foster-parents who had betrayed their trust.

Among the many, surprisingly precise, details offered us in the two accounts of young Garth's birth and infancy, is the name—or two efforts at the name—of the Weymouth physician who attended the tailor's wife, and introduced Sophia's baby into her bed. These, though given as Beaver by the letter-writer in the *Morning Chronicle*, and as Bevan by Miss Ham, have a persuasive resemblance, which might be accounted for by an error of transcription somewhere. The name assumes greater importance when we learn that Beavor was the name of the local apothecary in attendance on Princess Amelia at Weymouth in the autumn of 1809. Princess Mary gives us a picture of him in a letter to the King, her father.

'He is very attentive,' she wrote, 'and when once we got over his dreadful manners he certainly talks most reasonably, and [I] may add, comfortably, as to her recovery with care, but calls her a "Hot House Plant".'

Mr. Beavor received a mere £22 17s. for his attendance, according to an entry in the little red notebook in which the Princess Amelia kept a note of her medical expenses, in contrast to the more substantial sums paid to the other doctors who were called in, perhaps because he was merely a local worthy.

At the time of Princess Amelia's illness we know that General Garth was very much in evidence. Let us now have a closer look for ourselves at the legend that it was he who was the father of the foundling, Tom Garth.

## CHAPTER 17

### *The Purple Light of Love*

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Charles Cavendish Fulke Greville has been described as the greatest political diarist that England has known. Certainly posterity owes to him an invaluable picture of the life of his time, as well as an effervescing commentary which it is a pleasure to read for itself.

'Punch' Greville had excellent advantages, and he used them well. A scion of one of the oldest families in the kingdom; grandson of the Duke of Portland, who was twice Prime Minister; the private secretary from the age of twenty to a cabinet minister, Lord Bathurst; sure from the age of ten of the reversion of the post of Clerk to the Privy Council, which he held for most of his life; and holder of the comfortable sinecure of the Secretaryship of Jamaica, he was *persona grata* in the world of politics, the Court, society and the turf, and had unique opportunities for knowing the important, the celebrated, the notorious and the amusing men and women of the day.

He was intelligent but modest, and gay but discreet, idealistic and aspiring. Besides these solid qualities he must have had great charm of manner, warmth of heart and the will to please, as well as to gratify his love of life and of a good story, for he enjoyed the respect and confidence of men of weight, and of nearly every minister of note from the days of Wellington to those of Disraeli. The great Duke himself, as well as Melbourne, Peel and Clarendon, confided in Greville. No doubt they appreciated his well-balanced judgment and his scrupulous sense of fairness to friends and opponents—even political opponents—alike.

Greville's reputation was clouded for a while, for he suffered from poor editing, crude abridgements and interpolations, and the reverberations of Queen Victoria's outcries against his revelations about royalty. He has been called a mere gossip, and,

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worse, inaccurate. Now we know that his accuracy was impressive.

It is to this man that we owe our most precise account of the story that Princess Sophia and General Garth were lovers, and that Tommy Garth was the child of their union.

It was on March 17th, 1829, when all London was discussing the Garth affair, that Charles Greville wrote in one of his exercise books that it seemed likely that 'all Garth's history' would come out, 'unless they can stop the disclosures with money, though now so much has been said that it is hardly worth while'.

He proceeded to give the story.

'It was when the King and Queen lived at the Upper Lodge,' he wrote, referring to the period when Windsor Castle was being restored. 'The Princesses lived at the Lower Lodge. Pss. Sophia, however, was unwell, and was removed to the Upper Lodge, and a few days after the K. and Queen went to town, leaving the Pss. there. Garth, who was one of the King's equerries, remained also, and his bedroom at the Lodge was just over hers. Nine months from that time she was brought to bed.'

Greville had had the story from Lady Caroline Thynne, daughter of the Marquess of Bath, whose mother was Mistress of the Robes to Queen Charlotte.

'I am disposed to believe the evidence,' he added, 'because Lady Caroline is very simple, natural, and true, and had ample means of information, having been present during the whole period and living with them all in the greatest intimacy.'

At the time of the baby's birth the Court was, as we already know, at Weymouth. Somehow or other the secret was kept from the King, certainly at the time, and perhaps for ever. At the relevant period the King was rapidly advancing towards another mental breakdown.

In his journal, three days before the entry quoted above, Greville had written a passage which appears in the original manuscript in square brackets and followed by the word *delenda*, i.e. meet to be struck out. He probably intended to remove it if the question of publication arose, for his diaries were clearly intended for publication.

'The old King never knew it,' he wrote, then, on March 14th, 1829. 'The Court was at Weymouth when she was big with child. She was said to be dropsical, and then suddenly recovered.'

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They told the old King that she had been cured by *roast beef*, and this he swallowed, and used to tell it to people, all of whom knew the truth, as "a very extraordinary thing".'

\* \* \*

In December 1800, not long after the birth of her son, Princess Sophia wrote a very odd letter to Lady Harcourt, the Countess whom the sisters called their '2nd mother'. When Lady Harcourt died in 1826 Elizabeth wrote a tear-drenched letter home from Hesse-Homburg, saying, 'Such a friend was of all seasons. She shared with us many an agonising hour, and supported us under great trials and afflictions; and was ever the first to come forward to assist us when we most wanted a friend . . . she was honest to the *core*.' Perhaps Elizabeth was thinking of this occasion among others. Lady Harcourt had obviously been both frank and honest, as well as kind, to Sophia in an interview.

'My very dear Lady Harcourt,' Sophia wrote, '. . . You will easily believe that our *private conversation* has often occurred to my mind; how happy I now am that I had courage to begin it, for the excessive kindness of your manner has, I assure you, greatly smoothed my distressed and unhappy days and hours.

'Be assured, dearest Ly. H., that I will do all in my power to prove I am not ungrateful for all your kind concern about me, by the prudence of my conduct, but you will allow, I am sure, that I require time to recover my spirits, which have met with so severe a blow.

'I have no doubt that I was originally to blame, therefore I must bear patiently the *reports*, however unjust they are, as I have partially myself to thank for them; but, dearest Ly. H., when I reflect on the difference of your behaviour and that of others, it shows me how *insincere* the generality of this world are, and how one ought to *value* and revere a *true friend*, which is most justly stiled "*the most precious jewel in life*".'

Then Sophia goes on to add the strange sentence:

'It is grievous to think what a little trifle will slur a young woman's character for ever.'

A little trifle? Surely Sophia could not be referring to her baby in those terms? This letter is not the least puzzling aspect of a perplexing affair. Our bewilderment is not lightened by the conclusion of the passage, 'I do not complain, I submit patiently,



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and promise to strive to regain mine, which however imprudent I may have been, has, I assure you, been injured unjustly.'

In view of the fact that General Garth eventually adopted the child, gave him his name, and helped him in his career, the obvious assumption was that the General was in fact his father. Garth certainly made no bones about acknowledging him, and even seemed anxious to do so. It may have been that very anxiety which set the loosely-swivelled eighteenth-century tongues wagging. Some preferred to believe that an old and trusted royal servant, conveniently unmarried, was used to extricate the royal family from an awkward situation—or, rather, to alleviate its embarrassment.

General Garth was born in 1744, which made him about thirty-three years older than the princess with whom his name was connected. Unlike Sir Brent Spencer, he is not accorded a distinguished place in the *Dictionary of National Biography*; yet he was not without distinction in his day.

He came of an established family. His father, Sir John Garth, was Recorder of Devizes and a Member of Parliament. His great-uncle had been Physician-in-Ordinary to George I, whence perhaps sprang the family connection with the Court and his position as equerry. He, the third son, went into the army at eighteen, and was at twenty-one a lieutenant, at thirty-one a captain, at fifty-one a major-general, at sixty-one a lieutenant-general, and at seventy a full general. It was Garth who, in the company of another equerry, discovered the artist Thomas Lawrence as a boy at his father's inn at Devizes, and helped him to establish himself in London.

The German engineer, Landmann, described him as 'a little man, with good features, but whose face was much disfigured by a considerable purple mark on the skin, extending over part of his forehead and one eye'.

Glenbervie calls him 'a very plain man', and Charles Greville 'an ugly old devil'.

The King, at any rate, was fond of Garth, as he was of the other two equeries favoured by his daughters' attentions, Augusta's Brent Spencer and Amelia's Charles Fitz Roy. Such favouritism inevitably provoked jealousy. Just as Fitz Roy had been sneeringly dubbed 'Prince Charles', so Garth was known as 'The King's Garth'.

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Possibly Garth was given the King's affection without seeking too zealously after it. Fanny Burney said of him, 'He is sensible and intelligent. He has travelled much, and converses on the places he has seen very satisfactorily', and again, when parting from him, 'I was sorry to lose Major Garth, who seems a man of real worth, religious principles, and unaffected honour, with a strong share of wit and a great deal of literature.' One does not feel that even the gushing Fanny could write in those terms about an obvious toady. Yet is there not something a little obsequious about the figure he cuts in the two following little stories? The incidents took place aboard ship when the King was recovering from the 1804 attack of insanity. (Landmann, is the 'I' of the story.)

'In accordance with his usual practice, the King now turned towards his staff and cortege, ready to hear anything amusing or in any way worthy of being related to him, when Lieutenant-General Garth . . . stepped forward, and after exchanging a few words with the King, which I did not hear distinctly, remarked that the sash His Majesty had on was an exceedingly handsome one; upon which the King, with his left hand, taking up the ends which were hanging down, observed:

"Yes, yes; this is a very handsome sash—very handsome—very handsome—quite new! Charlotte makes all my sashes—she always makes them!"

'The sash was a very full-sized one, composed entirely of crimson netted silk, and quite fit for the purpose for which sashes were originally intended, that is, to carry off the wounded from the field of battle, for when spread out it would have measured a yard and a half in width, and at least three yards in length.'

The second episode also shows Garth most assiduously attending to the needs of his royal master.

'The King had taken off one of his military white gloves, and in dropping the ends of his sash, he also at the same time dropped the glove, upon which not only General Garth but several others nearest to the King scrambled for the glove on the ground in order to mark their zeal and attention to his Majesty; but the King, desirous of recovering his fallen glove without having to thank anyone for it, or perhaps wishing to display his activity, also attempted to seize it, in which he succeeded.'

All did not go smoothly, however.

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'On rising, the King's cane slipped from his hold, and again the King was the successful candidate for the prize.

'Now the sensation which the scrambling for the glove and then for the stick had created amongst the vast concourse of spectators was increased to an uncontrollable degree by the falling off of the King's hat, for the capture of which an increased number of competitors presented themselves, whose ambition to serve His Majesty greatly retarded its restitution.

'Colonel Campbell, at length, had the good fortune to rescue this from the hands of two members of the King's Household, who were struggling with each other for victory; whilst the King, holding out his hands for his property, his face, in consequence of his stooping, as red as his coat, exclaimed:

'“Never mind about the honour of the thing, never mind, never mind! Give me my hat! Give me my hat! There! There!”, as the King received his hat, “Thank you!—Thank you all alike!—You all picked it up!—Yes, yes! All! All! All!—You all picked it up!”

It gives us a glimpse of the ways of the courtiers as well as of a King, and, of course, of General Garth.

These were not the only awkward moments the King caused his equerry at Weymouth in 1804. The General had lent a splendid, high-spirited horse of his to Landmann. The King in returning a salute rather exuberantly 'swept off his hat to the full extent of his arm', slapping the horse with it right across the face. Not unnaturally, the animal plunged over the cliff. By some miracle, luckily for both rider and owner, he landed unhurt on a ledge nine or ten feet down. There were decided disadvantages to being an equerry to so odd a monarch.

Garth was a man of means. Queen Charlotte once referred to him as 'the rich general', and an observer of less exalted rank called him 'a fine gentleman of the old school in powder and pigtails'.

His country house, Ilsington, leased by him from the Earl of Orford, was described by Princess Mary to her father the King during a stay of hers while en route to Weymouth with the desperately ill Amelia. The time was nine years after the birth of the boy, Tommy Garth.

'It is', she says, 'quite an old-fashioned mansion—it stands in a courtyard, and the approach up to it is under an old avenue

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of fir-trees. You come into an emence [*sic*, immense] old large hall, up a very large staircase, which brings one into the most delightful, comfortable, long library I ever saw, which has three windows, and one in a long kind of recess with a balcony, which is quite charming—and this room is the General's constant living-room, summer and winter. His bedroom is next to it, which is likewise a very large good room. Below I saw a very good dressing-room, and a drawing-room, all equal large rooms, very lofty and well-proportioned.'

Did Sophia long to share this comfortable home? Like that other bachelor general, Brent Spencer, Garth did himself well.

Princess Mary also gives us a picture of the General himself at the time. He is still, we notice, high in royal favour.

He had received the two princesses 'with the greatest kindness, and nothing could exceed his attentive wish that Amelia should find everything comfortable at his house, and everything, I must say, was quite perfection, all in the most compleat order, and just as one would expect to find his house.'

'I am sorry to say he looks very ill,' Princess Mary's letter goes on, 'and is still very lame, and appeared in his large cloth shoes, and I fear must have fatigued himself with all the trouble he gave himself, as he would hobble up and down stairs much oftener than was necessary, and would not let anybody attend at breakfast but himself.'

It is all very endearing, but is it the picture of a lover to enrapture a clever and lively young princess? or, come to that, of one to force unwelcome attentions on her?

To the first question, Greville had an answer. 'Lady Bath told me on Sunday,' he wrote, 'that Caroline Thynne had told her she had no doubt Genl. Garth was the father, for the Princess was so violently in love with him that everybody saw it. She could not contain herself in his presence . . .' The only reason why people doubted Garth's being the father was that he was a hideous old devil, old enough to be her father, and with a great claret mark on his face—which is no argument at all, for women fall in love with anything—and opportunity and the accidents of the passions are of more importance than any positive merit either of mind or body. There they [the princesses] were secluded from the world, mixing with few people, their

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passions boiling over, and ready to fall into the hands of the first man whom circumstances enabled to get at them.'

There is an odd little reference of Princess Mary's which possibly supports this theory. It was in the autumn of 1798, two years before the birth of the child, and the princess was writing one of her gossip letters to her brother, the Prince of Wales.

'As for General Garth, the Purple Light of Love,' she says, '*toujours le même.*'

The allusion was, of course, to the purple birthmark on the little soldier's face. But, whose light of love? Was it obvious thus early that Sophia had a penchant for the General? Or is the remark a slightly contemptuous reference to his own amorous inclinations in general rather than particular?

Today we cannot be sure. We know only that the General adopted and acknowledged the child born in 1800, and we are fortunate in being able to examine through the eyes of Sophia's eighteen-year-old niece, Princess Charlotte, the relationship between the General and the boy. We shall do so in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 18

### *Old Garth and 'The Boy'*

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Princess Charlotte, Sophia's niece, the daughter of Prinny and heiress to the throne of Great Britain, described General Garth in her private letters to her closest friend in clear, bright colours.

In the summer of 1814 the Prince Regent had summarily dismissed his daughter's servants and attendants and had appointed the kindly Countess of Ilchester, the Dowager Lady Rosslyn ('as detestable an old lump of bones as ever was' in Charlotte's view), and her old sub-governess, the diffident and delicate Mrs. Campbell, in their stead. The Princess was forbidden contact with Mercer Elphinstone, a shrewd, indomitable, steady young Scotswoman, only child of the first Viscount Keith, her elder by eight years, with whom she was involved in a passionate friendship. Princess Charlotte spent a large part of her lonely days in writing long letters to her Mercer, recording every detail of the confined existence at Cranbourne Lodge, and afterwards at Weymouth, which she found unbearable, and they were smuggled out. These letters, the Bowood papers, only given to the public of recent years, have illuminated many a dark corner, and not least the one in which the 'Garth mystery' has lain so long obscured.

The fact is that General Garth, then seventy years of age, and by what extraordinary process of reasoning on the part of the Prince Regent we shall probably never know, was placed in control of his young daughter's Household. If he had been her Aunt Sophia's acknowledged lover it was an odd decision. If he was merely the foster-father of Tommy Garth, her son by another man, it was, as we shall see, one fraught with risk.

Charlotte herself was not pleased with the appointment.

'The old General', she wrote, 'is a very good-hearted, good-humoured old man, very vulgar in his conversation and language,

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but has a good deal to say for himself at times. He is very anxious to do all he can that is agreeable to me, and to make it comfortable and pleasant, but yet *you* are *right* in saying I *would rather not* have had him [as a member of her Household]. I do not think he is a *reporter* or a *mischief-maker*. If he is, he is a very imprudent one, as he speaks his mind out pretty openly at times . . .'

General Garth did not grow in the princess's esteem, and indeed seemed to have a gift for irritating her by his behaviour. Hardly more than a fortnight passed after this assessment of his character before she wrote:

'The old Gen. and I had quite a battle last night for wh. he is rather ashamed today. He was so excessively cross and testy at ba[ck]gammon that we left off in the middle of a game, vowing he would not play any more with me; certainly I shall not. I kept my temper and my tongue, wh. he did not . . .'

Worse offence was to come from Garth, however, than mere testiness at backgammon. In a month's time the Princess considered she had grave cause for complaint.

From Weymouth on the 10th September she wrote to Mercer that she had seen young Garth during a halt at the General's house, Ilsington, on the way from London. The boy was by then fourteen, and on his summer holidays from Harrow.

'I must tell you another thing that has also hurt me a good deal today—Garth's indelicate conduct about a *certain little boy* who was in his house when I was there. He was running about, and it was impossible (tho' he every now and then hid himself in the stable) for everybody with me not to see him. Garth told me *he was there*, and would be *much* mortified if I did not take notice of him, poor little soul. A heart of steel could not have refused that, for a *more lovely* boy was never beheld, I do think. I was so shockingly affected that I was ashamed of myself. Ly. I[lchester] and Mrs. C[ampbell] *both saw him*, but happily *Famine* [Lady Rosslyn] and the consequences [probably a reference to Lady Rosslyn's nieces, also in attendance on the princess] *did not*, or else it *did not strike them*. Both were *quite captivated* with his appearance, the former affected to tears. She talked a great deal to me about it, and expressed herself as the whole being to her an *entire mystery*, tho' she had heard much of it formerly, her astonishment at his [Garth's] being

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continued at all in the family, and that he should be appointed about me, *was unbounded*, and she was quite *disgusted* at his *unfeeling and indelicate conduct*, thus showing him with such unconcern.

'He announced Tom (for that is his name) being there by saying to me, "There is a young gentleman here who you may have heard of, and made some noise by some abominable stories of his being told, wh. were without a word of truth. Pray see and speak to him, as he would be dreadfully mortified if you took no notice of him, but don't let him be seen or let the ladies see *you take* any notice of him."

'The old man is not well, as he coughs and has a great deal of horceness [*sic*, hoarseness]. His house is an old rambling one, but large, and *might be made* easily very comfortable if he were not a bachelor. He *lives* well, for he gave an excellent dinner, and I never saw him in higher spirits or better pleased, tho' he was evidently in a *fuss* from the beginning to the end.

'He brought Tom up to the drawing room door that he might make his bow and take leave of me before I went, and he comes over in the gig to see him tomorrow here. He tells me he *dootes* [*sic*, doats] *on him* beyond anything, and that he is afraid he spoils him, for that Thursday by rights he ought to go back to school at Harrow, but he is not to go yet, poor little fellow. "When I named it to him," Garth said, "soon the tears came down *his fine blue eyes and dark eyelashes*." The last 6 weeks he has passed alone at Garth's house with a servant, hunting and shooting and fishing and riding all day long.'

Three days later Princess Charlotte wrote again.

'... Garth asked my leave yesterday mg. [morning] to go home and shoot, as *Tom* wished to shoot me some birds and he would like to spend the *part of that day, also today*, with him at his place, if I could spare him for that day *certainly* ... The truth is he is not the same person, and of little or no use since the boy has been here. He thinks of nothing else from mg, noon and night, and he is always out with him, and for *every reason*, I shall be truly glad when he is off to school. Do you not think there is *great* indelicacy in having him here, where I see him 50 times a day pass and repass, and then talking of him to me when we are alone, in the most easy manner that can be? Ly. I[chester] is quite shocked at it, but says it is all to create an interest in my



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mind, she was sure, but that she never saw anything more imprudently or worse managed.'

Lady Ilchester had probably not forgotten, and was perhaps suggesting that Garth had not either, that the princess was heiress to the throne. Two days later Princess Charlotte wrote again.

The General apparently was not content with constant absences from duty in order to satisfy his maudlin affection for young Tom. Charlotte found it even more intolerable when he brought the boy into Weymouth, where she would see him every day. General Garth saw to it that she did, and with such obvious meaning that she sought, rather wildly, for a motive behind these actions.

'... Garth goes on with the boy as much as ever in this style. He brought him back with him from his place, and is here now. He rides up and down the sands, passes my carriage daily with a parcel of officers who all look at him as well as my servants, who look at him and then talk to one another. I saw him in my courtyard playing with the horses and patting them etc. Already, I am told, it is observed and talked very much of here, and that Garth is *lowering* himself very much by such conduct. I never saw anybody so shocked at it as Mrs. C[ampbell], who can hardly bear the sight of him coming over, for it has so wholly changed her opinion of him. I am quite clear it is done for some purpose, some motive, and to create some interest or other in my mind, as he always talks of him when we are alone. He goes to Harrow today or tomorrow, and then it is to be hoped Garth will come round again, and [be] more himself again, wh. he is not now. I cannot tell you how it wounds me, and how severely hurt I am at this most outrageous behaviour. It looks like this, that not being able to torment *her now* any longer with the sight, he will continue it upon the relative in the world she loves the best besides the D. of York, and upon one who is the most attached to her of any of the family, wh. is me—a sort of diabolical *revenge* that one cannot understand.'

Who was the mysterious 'her' Garth sought to torment, if he did, and whom the recipient of the letter would recognize at once? The reference to the Duke of York's close attachment to her makes it almost certain that Princess Sophia was meant. Sophia was the Duke's favourite sister, and perhaps his dearest

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friend. She visited him constantly, and cheered his last hours with devoted attentions. Their closeness was remarkable, and acknowledged by all.

Next day Princess Charlotte added:

'I saw little or nothing of Garth the whole of yesterday, and what I did he was out of spirits and not in good humour. The fact is the boy goes to school today, and it is a terrible day to him as well as to the boy. Dr. Butler [the Headmaster of Harrow] is extremely particular in the boys return to Harrow, and the fact is he ought to have been done the 14th or 13th, instead of which *he read* the 17th, *as he says*, and so made the mistake of his remaining a few days longer. But I will not allow it, for he heard me say that Ly. M. Talbot's boy was gone to Harrow, as well as Ly. E. Fielding's, and therefore he *must have heard it*. I am excessively glad he is fairly off, as he was of *no use* to us here, and showing him about as he did was most terribly ill-judged. This conduct has cost him amazingly in the whole county, and on that account he keeps little or no good company but farmers and the parson of the village. He has saddled the boy however to London upon Gen. Jones, who goes up for Q[ueentin's] court martial today, and Mr. Harcourt in the coach. He begged to put the boy under his care, wh. General Jones agreed to from his knowing him very well, as he has often breakfasted with him and his aid de camp. This little man as you see has been partout, and *knew* as well I think no doubt is possible. Garth's mode of education, whatever he may be, is very bad, for conceive his being a whole 6 weeks by himself in the country with no upper servant or tutor to take charge of him but some boys and housemaids, and no society but farmers. The mind gets lowered *sooner* than one is *aware* of, and when too late the discovery will be made, but it can never be again raised.'

On Sunday, two days later, the princess wrote again:

'I must tell you that Garth never once made his appearance yesterday. He did not breakfast with the ladies, and I did not see him more than them. About 5 a message came from him by his servant to say some *particular* business had called him away in so great a hurry to his house that he could not come make his excuses, but that if he did not return between 5 and 6 he should not be able to be back in time for my dinner. He never came, and at night this person returned saying the Gen. was

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detained by his particular business, and would not be back till this mg. This is certainly *very odd*, and not *right conduct*. It is all for the boy, I know, who was to go to school. It has had a great effect in this small circle, and I *know has been very much talked of* in the town . . .'

Next day she wrote:

'Garth returned yesterday mg., and was quite himself again the whole day. The young gentleman was off for school that mg., and the day before he spent with him quietly at home, as there was neither hunting or shooting to be had. I know perfectly well that *all Weymouth* went to see the boy when he was at his hair dresser's. I have no idea if the man [Sharland the tailor?] be alive or there still. Ly. I[lchester] and Mrs. C[ampbell], who talk of it now and then to me, still will have it that it *cannot be* and *is not* G[arth's] child, that he has the care of it, and is proud and vain that it *should be thought* his, and knowing he has it in his power probably to disclose whose it is, if offended, makes him so very bold and impudent about the whole thing. They know nothing of the story but only repeated to me what they had heard at different times in the County.

'There is a story of him that is too bad, that he beat the child on a table before some company, and *swore by all that* was sacred *it was his*, and then turning round said "Then gentlemen, I leave it to you to say who the mother is, and if it is possible after this, that it can be the lady that has been named."

'At the card table at Windsor one night he was made angry by something or other, and the Queen asking him when he returned to Dorsetshire, he said he did *not know*, as the *boy he had adopted* was sick at Harrow School.

'Both these stories I know to be true. One of the ideas of the County was that there is *some to come out yet*, and that if it ever does, it will turn out to be *some secret marriage*, or something of that kind . . .'

Again, after recording a temporary, unauthorized absence of General Garth's from his post of duty, Princess Charlotte commented:

'About 3 today he walked in, and is *come now to stay*. The young thing is at school. It was *not him* that took him home . . . Is it not a singular thing that in his early part of life he had an *exemplary* life, but that since the affair of the boy he has been

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totally changed? He *keeps no good company at all*. He never visits or receives any from the gentlemen about here, and indeed so *low is his society* that *they would think themselves lowered* to keep such manners [*sic*]. He hunts with the gentlemen of the County, but further they never meet. One can hardly believe at his time of life he should *live in* and like *bad company*, wh. he certainly does *for the farmers etc in his set*; and on a Sunday the country clergyman with his wife and family dine with him . . .

On December 14th of the same year Charlotte was relieved to find she need not break another journey to Weymouth at Garth's house, and said, 'I have got Garth to give up the wish he had of this . . . Ly I[lchester] indeed was anxious rather than otherwise that I should not stay at Garth's unless I felt it would be a relief or anything else to me, for she thought of what we might *again meet there*, and wished to *avoid* such a *meeting*. The youngster [Tommy Garth] came over this mng to see me, as if I had gone to Garth's he would not, as he was going out hunting. I could not tell this to Ly I. as no one but Garth knew of his having seen me.'

By the end of July of the next year Garth was in deep disgrace.

'Garth's conduct', the Princess wrote from Weymouth, 'is quite inexplicable, his letters to Adden[brooke] also, not a word of *doing duty* here. Indeed *tho' here last year he did never* but what he chose. His return would be most unpleasant, as our eyes are quite open about him. He could now only come as a *spie to watch and repeat* to[o] *may be*, as he is quite got over now by P.R. [the Prince Regent] and in his interests . . . Garth is a *double-faced, interested cunning old dog*.'

And, as if that were not enough, a week later, she added:

'I find Garth is to be at his own house in a few days, of this he has not acquainted any of us, so we are not supposed to know it. It is said that *knowing* an evil is the next to avoiding it. If so, that is my case, for I *now* thoroughly know *who and what* I have to deal with, and shall act accordingly. I know you never could endure him. I always *thought* what you have [illegible word here] *expressed*. I like to see it so plainly stated now because I do so fully agree.'

Presumably the Regent never knew of Garth's strange conduct regarding the boy. He would hardly have approved of it, yet he undoubtedly approved of the General. When Garth not

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long afterwards resigned his post in the Princess's Household and Colonel Addenbrooke succeeded him, the Regent urged the Colonel to talk fully and frankly with the General and to take him as a model. Nothing, he said, could better suit his wishes 'than the exemplary line of conduct which has been observed by the General since he has been placed about Charlotte'. Then, as the Regent was unable to be present at Windsor at the time of Garth's actual departure in order to thank him in person for his services, he took the trouble to urge his mother the Queen to express to him 'not only my most unqualified approbation of his conduct, but my warmest thanks for the cheerfulness and extreme attention' with which he had 'met and at the same time defeated many difficulties'. The Queen promised to read the appropriate passage in his letter to the General, and felt sure he would be 'much flattered by it'.

Besides all this, there is the testimony of the magnificent silver salver still in the possession of the family presented to Garth by the Prince Regent, and inscribed with the words: 'As a proof of the Prince's being thoroughly sensible of the attention shewn to the Princess Charlotte of Wales, by General Garth during the time Her Royal Highness was under his care, and which the Prince Regent states can never be forgotten by him, particularly when He recalls the very handsome manner in which the General came forward on the occasion.' It is dated the 2nd May, 1816.

There is no doubt that the General was a highly efficient and assiduous officer when he cared to carry out his duties, and the Prince Regent and his mother cannot have learned of the occasions when he scamped or exceeded them with a casualness verging on insolence towards his young mistress whom he might have pitied in her peculiar situation, torn as she was from an untender mother and abandoned by a jealous father.

The General's loyalty even to his master was not without blemish. He complained bitterly to Princess Charlotte of him.

'[Garth] told me really with tears', she wrote, 'that he found his situation was quite a sinecure, that he could be of no use in conciliating between the P.R. and me, that instead of having the active direction of everything, that he *knew nothing* till done . . . Servants came and went, carriages here and there, servants went to Weymouth etc, all without his being con-

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sulted, and if he had *not stopped* the servants from going, I should *not have had* one in the house left, and all the answer he gets is, it is *by order* of C[arlton] H[ouse] . . .'

He also told the princess things in secret, under the guise of personal loyalty, and criticized her father, frothing with rage at the Regent's 'cock and bull stories', and going so far as to say that it was his opinion that it was only because she wished to go to Brighton that her father had decided to send her to Weymouth. He told the old Queen that 'he had no money, and that *there was none* given him for expences etc', and 'made a terrible piece of work about not having any money for the journey or household'. He was temperamental, could be disingenuous, and was obviously capable of getting his own way even in circumstances as difficult as serving two or three members at once of this extraordinary family—this 'royal menagerie', as Princess Charlotte called it, declaring roundly that 'no family was ever composed of such odd people'. Hers is a lady-like version of Greville's famous dictum that 'the three kingdoms could not furnish such a brood—so many and so bad—rogues, blackguards, fools and whores'.

On Sunday, 1st October, 1815, the Princess relates a significant piece of news.

'Tom Garth has decided for the army at last, and Garth has been to Frederick [the Duke of York, who was Commander-in-Chief of the Army] in consequence to tell him so and to get a commission for him. He has been all good nature about it, and he is to give him a cornetcy very shortly in a light dragoon regt. He is then to be a Hussar and go abroad to learn different languages . . .' The light dragoon regiment was actually the General's former regiment, the 1st Dragoon Guards.

After that the boy dropped out of the princess's correspondence with her friend for a while, but General Garth himself suddenly assumed importance when a delicate situation arose concerning the reappearance of an old lover, Captain Hesse, literally outside her window at Weymouth. Charlotte, with something of her father's ruthlessness in such matters, bluntly wished him 'got rid of'. She 'resolved to see Garth alone and tell him what I had seen, and make him find out and send him off directly. Had I not committed the Gen. I know he would equally have found it out, as he knows everything that is done in this place,

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and everybody that comes in and out of it, and probably he would have made a very disagreeable publick business of it. I avoided all this.'

The General appears to have behaved well on this occasion, and to have somewhat reinstated himself in her opinion.

'He at once saw the whole thing as it was, found him out, and went and sat with him for some time, told him plainly it was his duty from his situation here and also by my commands to advise him to quit this as soon as possible, the consequences resulting from his not doing so, and a knowledge of his imprudence in coming here, if known by higher powers, would be most serious to him . . . I found Garth very reasonable and really kind and good-natured about it. He expressed himself quite pleased with my conduct and with Mr. Hesse too, who had behaved very well. The General told me he had offered his services to him, if at any time he could be of use to him . . . the whole has ended quite quickly and well, the General saying no one knew it but *himself*, and *that it should remain between us*. As a good precaution I wrote to Frederick [the Duke of York] this mg . . . I told Gen. Garth I had done so.'

However, in seventeen days she was again writing on the irritating subject of the boy.

' . . . Garth is here in great good humour. He was ill and confined at home, for a bare fortnight. The boy is come home and is going directly into the army. Next Gazette look for his name in the Royals. Frederick has given him a cornetcy in Garth's regt. He has left Harrow and is to go abroad directly to learn French and German perfectly, then to join the regt. afterwards. He only called here today on his way with the hounds so that nobody's eyes have been offended with seeing him about this time, wh. is a fortunate circumstance, as really during the summer holidays it was a great deal too much and too bad how he was thrust forward. The hunting happily quite occupies his time, and as the hounds are the other side of this, it is all very well . . . '

That is the last of Princess Charlotte's embarrassed references to the aggravating boy. Her contributions to our information leave us still uncertain as to whether the General was the boy's real father or not. We can only feel sure that the General, apparently willingly, and without losing favour at Court (which

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might be considered to be an argument against his having been Sophia's seducer) took the boy into his home, freely acknowledged him, giving him both his surname and his Christian name, and did his best for him. He saw to it that (or at least agreed to the arrangement by which) he went into his own old regiment, the 1st Dragoons, and he seems to have made other efforts to help him in his career.

There is extant a letter among Sir Herbert Taylor's papers, written by General Garth and addressed to the Duke of York, in which the General rather oddly refers to Tommy Garth as his 'protegee' [*sic*], not as his son, and which reveals that there had already been correspondence between the two concerning him.

The letter is dated October 6, 1818, when the old Queen was dying wretchedly of dropsy, and the relevant paragraph runs:

'I have not written on the subject of my protegee, fearing to intrude on the anxious moments so lately occupied by the melancholy intelligence daily received from Kew. As I received a report of his being ill' at Sligo with a fever, I became greatly alarmed, and therefore applied to Sir George Beckwith for leave of absence for him as soon as he was able to travel, which was kindly granted till December, and he is now in Dorsetshire in perfect health.'

Young Garth, then a lieutenant, was gazetted captain in the 37th or North Hampshire Regiment of Foot two years later, but he never rose above that rank. In his profession, as in his character, he was to personify the typical period villain, the half-pay army captain.



## CHAPTER 19

### *The Box*

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For nearly thirty years after his birth the existence and fortunes of a being called Tom or Tommy Garth were subjects merely for the gossips and the court diarists. Then suddenly the nation found his name appearing in all its newspapers, associated with those of General Garth, Princess Sophia and Sir Herbert Taylor. The leader-writers, news columnists and correspondents, though clearly excited, and often scurrilously-minded, were mysterious. Their allusions, while of horrible import, remained allusive. They suggested rather than asserted. There was something afoot, it seemed, of which they had had wind, but they were in no position to publish facts, only to hint darkly at possibilities.

At length the nation was given something positive, if still unsatisfactory. On the 28th of February Captain Thomas Garth had filed an affidavit in the Court of Chancery, and eager editors hastened to publish its contents. What *The Times* gave to its readers will be found in the Appendix of this book, but as it makes somewhat laborious reading it may suit us here to read merely what the writer of the first leader in *The Times* of Saturday, March 14, 1829, had to say about it.

‘A portion of the mysterious affair, to which such frequent allusions have been made,’ he wrote, ‘has at length come out. This portion—but a small one, indeed, of the whole—is an affidavit made (as the ground of an injunction from the Court of Chancery) by Captain Garth. The deponent (Garth) herein swears, that Sir Herbert Taylor had agreed—as the agent, no doubt, of some more important person—TO PAY GARTH’S DEBTS, and settle on him an annuity for life of THREE THOUSAND POUNDS a year, as a recompense for the mysterious contents of a certain box.

‘The bargain was closed, and the box was to be deposited,

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with its contents, at Messrs Paul's, the bankers, under the several seals of Sir Herbert Taylor, as the agent of the unknown personage, and of Mr. Charles Molloy Westmacott, as Garth's agent, till the proper securities for the round sum, and the payment of the annuity, could be got ready.

'Garth having relinquished the box, no round sum has been advanced, and no securities for the annuity have been prepared.

'The object of Garth's affidavit, therefore, originating in a suspicion of his quondam friend Westmacott's faith, is to prevent him from going with Sir Herbert to the bankers and claiming the box, before the stipulated price has been paid to Garth! "This deponent further saith, that he believes that the said Charles Molloy Westmacott intends to join with the said Sir Herbert Taylor in demanding the said box and its contents, and in preventing the deponent from regaining possession of it, or of the stipulated equivalent for it."

'Such is the portion of this extraordinary transaction which is now made known by the affidavit—an affidavit pregnant, no doubt with the most important inferences.'

What was the mysterious box, and what did it contain? *The Times* did not know for certain, any more than did anyone else, for the affidavit had been evasively worded, but it could guess, and it intended at least to help its readers to some comprehension of the gossip that was going about."

'Who is Sir Herbert Taylor, and who are Garth and Westmacott?' asked the leader-writer rhetorically, knowing well that Taylor had already been the distinguished repository of court secrets for thirty-five years, and had been confidential secretary first to the late King, George III, and then to his Queen Charlotte, and that all the world had heard of Westmacott, the disreputable editor of the *Age*.

This Westmacott has come down to us as one of the most contemptible men of his time. The 'rosy-gilled little journalist', as one biographer described him, was an impudent braggart, and an ostentatious vulgarian, 'one who notoriously made market of the scandals of others'. His notebooks, put up for sale after his death, revealed that he had a particular relish for royal scandals, containing as they did such entries as alleged accounts of the conversation between George IV and Beau Brummell on the Prince's marriage night; of the dealings of the Duke of

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Gloucester and his executors with regard to a Mrs. Maguire and her son; of the history of a natural daughter of the Duke of Kent; of Princess Charlotte's first lover; and of the supposed offspring of Princess Amelia. Westmacott's method of operating was to send his victim a hint of the rumoured scandal, with perhaps a news paragraph and threats of further inquiry and exposure. Timid victims paid up at once. To the more stubborn the screw was mercilessly applied, even to the extent of printing off a newspaper item ready for publication. Though Westmacott was horsewhipped at least once for his pains, very large sums were undoubtedly extorted from those who, even when innocent, feared publicity. There was probably in all England no more accomplished villain in the art of blackmail. To be associated with him in any transaction was in itself a suspicious circumstance.

'And what could bring the first into contact with the two last?' *The Times* continued, apropos of Taylor, Garth and Westmacott. 'The answers are obvious. However, for a moment we pass over this: our object is, not to create general disgust by sad disclosures, but to prevent, if possible, future mischief to the state. And a proof of these proper feelings is, that we have refrained from publishing this affidavit till it has appeared in all the other papers, though we have had it in our hands for more than a week, and obscurely alluded to it in our journal of last Saturday, to make it known to those who were most interested that we had it.'

Two days later *The Times* had this to add:

'The affidavit of Mr., or Captain Garth, which we published in our last number, wrapped up though it was, and guarded against all avoidable disclosures, has driven some people to a state which borders on insanity. The most desperate denials of facts have been attempted by certain daily and weekly mercenaries, but it is all in vain.

'If it be desired to conceal from a Christian community the contents of a certain box, will "somebody" be pleased to inform us how Captain Garth's demand of a large sum of money, and an enormous pension, came to be listened to even for a moment?

'That there was a promise—an engagement—to comply with them, no one dares to dispute. What then, was the consideration? This is what the world calls for. People do not now-a-days

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bind themselves for nothing, for no necessity, for no dread of infamy, or other paramount evil, to pay the debts of those who importune or threaten them—debts amounting to very many thousands of pounds, and to pay, besides, annuities of £3,000 per annum;—they do not, we say, bind themselves under such heavy obligations, if they have nothing to fear as the consequence of their refusal to incur them.

‘What, then, we ask again, was the service which Captain Garth had rendered to the principal party, of whom Sir Herbert Taylor is the agent, equivalent to so vast a recompense?’

‘If no service had been rendered, what service was expected?’

‘To come to the point—*what secret was to be kept?* Tell that, or say nothing.

‘Two mystifications have been got up, since it was found impossible to pass by this affidavit or to answer it: 1st, a parentage has been described for the person swearing it; 2nd, his character has been violently abused. But these are silly diversions of the public feeling: the morals of this individual have no sort of bearing on the case, let them be ever so monstrous or disgusting.

‘The point to which these clumsy advocates should direct themselves is not, *what* is Captain Garth, but *who* is he.’

That was going as far as *The Times* cared to do.

Leigh Hunt’s *Examiner* was bolder or brassier. Its readers on Sunday, March 15th, were greeted by a headline which forthrightly introduced the name which the editors of most papers were too squeamish or too timid to print in too close a connection with Garth’s:

‘THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR — MR. WESTMACOTT, CAPTAIN GARTH, SIR HERBERT TAYLOR, AND THE DUKE OF CUMBERLAND.’

Under that headline the *Examiner* commented:

‘There is just now much talk about a Captain Garth (at present, we believe, in France), who, according to the reports in circulation, has recently discovered that he is *not* the son of his reputed father, General Garth, but the offspring of two individuals of very high birth and station in this country.’

Two days before *The Globe* had also shaken its head over the ‘singular affidavit’, had emphasized that the box of papers related to Garth’s ‘fortune, station, and affairs’, and had pointed

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out that 'the only reason alleged or suggested against such receipt [that is, the one given to Taylor and Westmacott] being given to him, Captain Garth directly, and in favour of such use of the said Charles Molloy Westmacott's name, was lest some colour or countenance should be thereby given to certain rumours then supposed to exist respecting the nature of certain documents and papers supposed to be in the possession of him, Captain Garth', and had added, 'This is a strange business.'

The main leader in the same issue had also directed its attention to the documents in the case.

'It is to these papers that the mysterious paragraphs which have appeared in some papers have related. The rumours in themselves have been so horrible, and so unsupported by accessible evidence, that we have thought proper to avoid any allusion to them which would imply that they were entitled to any attention, especially as the illustrious person implicated in them was so little popular, on other accounts, as to make it likely that imputations on him might much too greedily be listened to. The friends of the illustrious person alluded to—we know not why we should not mention him—the Duke of Cumberland—have denied the truth of the accusation in the most positive terms, and the following paragraph from the *Morning Chronicle* shews that some further proceedings are contemplated, or in progress.'

And the *Globe*, an evening paper, reprinted the paragraph which had appeared in its sister-paper, the *Morning Chronicle*, that very day.

'The deep and painful interest,' the leader had run, 'excited by some recent strictures on the conduct and character of a personage whose position has become an object of national curiosity, as was to be expected, led to a minute investigation, which has assumed a form almost entitled to the appellation of *demi-official*.'

There had indeed, according to Thomas Creevey, the Pepys of the period, been 'a hurry-scurry at Windsor', but the *Globe's* hopes were not to be fulfilled. No proceedings, official or demi-official, appear to have been instigated.

Who was this Thomas Creevey who appeared to be so well informed? The best little biography of this amusing and endearing character comes from the hand of Charles Greville, writing in the very year, 1829.

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'Old Creevey is rather an extraordinary character . . . I believe he was an attorney or barrister; he married a widow, who died a few years ago; she had something, he nothing; he got into Parliament, belonged to the Whigs, displayed a good deal of shrewdness and humour and was for some time very troublesome to the Tory Government . . . he lost his seat . . . Then his wife died, upon which event he was thrown upon the world with about £200 a year or less; no home, few connections, a great many acquaintances and extraordinary spirits. He possesses nothing but his clothes; no property of any sort; he leads a vagrant life, visiting a number of people who are delighted to have him . . . He is certainly a living proof that a man may be perfectly happy and exceedingly poor, or rather without riches, for he suffers none of the privations of poverty and enjoys many of the advantages of wealth. I think he is the only man I know in society who possesses nothing.'

Creevey needed nothing besides the charm he had in abundance, and which brought him innumerable friends and confidants. The secrets he learned he transmitted with great liveliness, and, sometimes, animus, to Betty Ord, his unmarried step-daughter and faithful correspondent.

If the journalists of the day longed to wound but feared to strike, diarists and letter-writers like Creevey were under no such restraint. They were busily scribbling down the facts they understood to lie behind some affair which had led to a certain arrangement involving money, and which had led to a disagreement, which in turn had led to the famous affidavit and the consequent publicity.

As early as February 4th Princess Lieven, the wife of the Russian Ambassador in London, had been referring to 'a horrible business talked about in the matter of the Duke of Cumberland'.

Then Creevey, on February 14th, writing from Brooks's to his beloved Betty, remarked, '. . . There is nothing going forward except this reported visit of the Duke of ———'. Cumberland had actually landed in England that day. '. . . Are you aware that Captain Garth, at the suit of the old King, consented to pass for the father of this son?'

He goes on immediately to throw light on the mysterious transaction. There were letters in the box which gave away the alleged secret.

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'The latter, in every way worthy of his villainous father, has shown all the letters upon this occasion, including one of the King's. The poor woman [presumably Princess Sophia] has always said that this business would be her death. Garth asks £30,000 for the letters, and, to enhance their value, shews the worst part of them.'

On March 2nd Creevey had more of interest to retail to his Betty.

'So, having just met old Ogg [Lord Kensington] in the street in spectacles, he having lost an eye since I last saw him, and after hearing an account of the different calamities affecting his life, property and character, we got to this Windsor gossip. So says Ogg in his accustomed manner—"Damme! I know exactly what it is all about, and if you promise never to mention my name, I'll tell you." I need not observe that the condition he imposed upon me I should have gratuitously adopted, as the disclosure would, with most, destroy my story. However, he swore he knew the facts of his own knowledge, and they are these—

'Knight, a barrister of the Court of Chancery, has been advertising the Chancellor lately that on this day he should move for an injunction against Sir Herbert Taylor about Garth's letters, which have been placed in his hands under some agreement with Garth, and which the latter or his creditors wish to make more favourable for themselves, £3,000 a year for life and £10,000 in hand were the considerations, but it is sought to make it £16,000 in hand. Ogg adds that it is the fear of all this being made publick that has caused all these mutinies between the Beau and Prinney and Chancellor and D. of Cumberland. Ogg says, too, that he knows all the contents of these letters, and stated quite enough of them to account for all this Windsor hurry-scurry . . .'

On March 19th Creevey reverts to the Garth affair.

' . . . Does your paper ever give you any light upon the old affair of Garth? Did it contain his affidavit? You see it is now established in proof in a suit in Chancery that Sir Herbert Taylor had agreed to give Garth £3,000 a year for his life, and to pay his debts; and that, upon this being done, certain letters were to be given up to Taylor. In the meantime they were deposited in Snow's bank in the joint holding of the said bankers and Mr. Westmacott, the editor of the *Age* newspaper . . .'

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‘There is quite enough in this—Taylor being the purchaser and the price so monstrous—to make it quite certain the letters must contain great scandal affecting very great parties . . .

‘General Garth is still alive, and it was when he was extremely ill and thought himself quite sure of dying that he wrote to young Garth, telling him who he was, explaining the part he—the General—had been induced to act out of respect and deference to the royal family . . .

‘General Garth recovered unexpectedly, and applied to young Garth for the documents; but, I thank you! they had been seen and read and deemed much too valuable to be given back again.’

*The Greville Diary* takes us further.

On March 14th, the day of *The Times* leader quoted above, Greville had entered, between square brackets, with his note that they were the sort of details which ought to be deleted, the following.

‘Yesterday Garth’s affidavit appeared. Lord B[athurs]t told me likewise that Taylor had discovered that Garth had retained copies of the papers when he gave up the originals—that Genl. Garth certainly is the father (which I believe he certainly is not) and that the letters which affect the Duke of Cumb[erlan]d, are letters from her to Garth complaining of his having made attempts upon her person. It is notorious that the Old Queen forbade the Duke’s access to the apartments of the princesses.

‘There is another story which I am inclined to believe; that he is not the son of the Duke or Garth, but of some inferior person (some say a page of the name of Papendyck) and that the secret was entrusted to Garth.’

Then follows the passage, already quoted, about how the catastrophe was kept secret from the ‘old King’ by putting the princess’s indisposition down to dropsy.

This may be the place to call to mind a bright little picture of Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, as a young man, caught for us literally hanging round his sisters’ apartments. Fanny Burney is the author.

‘A door was now opened from an inner apartment, where, I believe, was the grand collation for the Princess Sophia’s [twenty] birthday, and a tall thin young man appeared at it, peeping and staring, but not entering.



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“How do you do, Ernest?” cried the princess [Augusta], “I hope you are well; only pray do shut the door.”

He did not obey, nor move, either forwards or backwards, but kept peering and peeping. She called him again, beseeching him to shut the door; but he was determined to first gratify his curiosity, and when he had looked as long as he thought pleasant, he entered the apartment; but Princess Augusta, instead of receiving and welcoming him, only said, “Goodbye, my dear Ernest; I shall see you again at the play.”

He then marched on, finding himself so little desired, and only saying: “No, you won’t; I hate the play!”

On March 22nd Greville had more to add. All London was agog with gossip, and he was in touch with one of the principal actors in the drama.

Met Taylor yesterday and talked about Garth’s business. He says that he shall as far as he is concerned be against paying any money, as the object of payment was to avoid publicity, and that is now impossible. Garth is an idiot as well as a scoundrel. Taylor was to have paid him £1,500 a year, and half his debts, General Garth the other half. He kept attested copies of the papers in the box, and these he showed to anybody who would read them.

Westmacott has abstracts of all the papers, which he offered to give up to Taylor. He says Westmacott has behaved well to him, and he has never given him any money (money however of course he has had, for he is the Editor of the *Age*, and a great villain).

The papers prove that old Garth is the father, of which Taylor says there is no doubt. Old Garth had assured the D. of York that they were all destroyed.

Greville did not appear to accept Taylor’s version without question. Even five days before, while showing an inclination to believe the simple Caroline Thynne’s account of the alleged seduction of Sophia by General Garth, he had nevertheless set down some adverse comments on Cumberland’s character. Clearly he could believe anything of him, and he had by no means made up his mind.

As to the Duke of Cumb[erland]d, he had written, ‘everything about him is mysterious, but there must be some cause for the universal and deep execration in which he is held, especially

## THE BOX

by his own family. The present King, who is all over mystery, likewise used to detest him, but for some years past, whether by the possession of a secret or by some other means, the Duke has gained a complete influence over him.

'Lord Bathurst told me that the only time he ever nearly quarrelled with the D. of York was about Lady Bathurst's visiting the Dss. of Cumb[erlan]d. They had a violent dispute (the Duke being against visiting her) in which he said, speaking of the Duke, "If you knew——" and then stopped. Some reason there must have been for the inflexibility of the Queen about him and the Dss. She never would see him. Then the rest of the rl. family always spoke of him with horror, and all the people who had lived in their interior. Sellis's affair was never cleared up, and though there was not a tittle of evidence to inculcate the D. of Cumb[erlan]d everybody believes that there is some mystery of an atrocious character, in which he is deeply and criminally implicated.'

Greville ends:

'It is all horrid. The rl. family is dragged through the mire and exposed to contempt, and this will have its effect hereafter.

## CHAPTER 20

### *Blackmail*

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So there we have the story. Taylor, the loyal old palace servant, who had been involved in the unhappy affair from the beginning, acting for the royal family, or Princess Sophia (and probably for General Garth as well), had agreed to pay Tommy Garth's debts and to settle on him £3,000 a year for life on condition that he deposited with a firm of bankers a box containing papers which proved him to be the illegitimate son of the Princess Sophia and a lover, who may have been her own brother. Sir Herbert Taylor had affixed his seal to the box, which was not to be opened without his permission. All this had taken place in the preceding November.

Before this, however, according to Tommy Garth himself, negotiations had been going on. In June 1827, badly in debt and pressed by his creditors, he had, for the first time in his life, approached his 'parent' for money. He had been referred to Sir Herbert Taylor, who had induced him to sign a document by which he was to receive an annuity of £1,200, but only on condition that he acknowledged that he had in fact no claim on the person from whom the 'bounty' flowed, and that he agreed never to try to communicate with her in future. No sooner had he signed this 'treaty' than Tommy Garth had regretted it, and had tried to recall it, though still hoping that the money would be paid, and without conditions. Sir Herbert Taylor had refused to return the document or to permit a copy of it to be made. Nor would he consider any allowance without terms attached, though Tommy asserted that his mother could never have been a party to any such agreement.

'No, Sir Herbert,' he declared he had written, 'in secret confidence I have abundant proof that I am not estimated in that noble heart in the light of a formal pensioner. I know from her own authority that her feelings towards me are affectionate and

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liberal in the extreme.' He would rather beg his bread than buy an income by 'renouncing the inalienable right and paramount blessing of communicating under proper regulation with the only person on earth (with one venerated, but I fear not long subsisting, exception) to whom I can look for protection, and from whom I have hitherto received my whole support . . . What would you think of me? What would that Illustrious Individual think of me? She would inevitably despise me . . .'

General Garth had been aware of Tommy's application, had sanctioned it, had read the correspondence exchanged, had approved of Tommy's conduct, and certainly of the reasons for his rejection of the terms stipulated.

It was only after all this, according to Tommy, that he had come into possession of 'the indisputable and only proofs' of his birth, parentage and 'first title to rank and fortune'. After the negotiations had fallen through the General had sent for him to his house in Montague Square, and had ordered his confidential servant to bring him a paper parcel usually left in his charge when his master was away from his Dorset seat. He had given it to Tommy, telling him 'to guard and preserve' it. The documents contained in the parcel, consisting of 'books, letters, receipts, vouchers, memoranda and writings', Tommy Garth maintained 'were of very great value and importance' to his fortune, station and affairs, to the claims he had on certain persons named in them, and to 'the mode by which such claims could be substantiated and enforced'. They were the only existing documents whereby he could 'prove his birth, his baptism and his presumptive claim to hereditary rank and fortune'.

It was then that Sir Herbert Taylor, hearing that young Garth was in possession of these papers, sought to get hold of them, or at least to have them safely deposited where none could reach them. It was he who then approached Tommy, and not Tommy who made the first move, and the discussions that followed were a renewal of negotiations, suggested by him, and not an attempt at extortion on Tommy's part. This time, significantly, the offers were higher, the annuity now being raised to £3,000 and a settlement of outstanding debts to the amount of £10,000 being proposed. In return for this the box, it was agreed, should be sealed and deposited in a banker's hands.

Such was the gist of Tommy's story.

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Perhaps, even at the risk of being tedious, it is worth elucidating the situation, at this stage, as far as possible, about the depositing of this valuable box of papers at the bank on that 24th November 1828. It is obvious that all parties were nervous.

According to Garth's affidavit, on November 20th, at a meeting at Taylor's house, it had been agreed that the box was to stay at the bank named by Westmacott in order to ensure 'due and punctual' payments of the annuity.

On November 21st Garth took the box to Westmacott's house, and in the presence of Sir Herbert Taylor opened it, showed its contents, re-locked it, and saw it taped and sealed with the seals of Taylor, Westmacott and himself. The key was kept by Garth 'for the purpose of more fully manifesting that this deponent was entitled to the re-possession of the said box and its contents' in case the agreement should fall through.

On November 24th the box was deposited (provisionally and for intermediate safe custody, according to Garth) at the bank, in the names of the two agents for the principal parties, Taylor and Westmacott. Two receipts were given to them, joint receipts, so the box could not be removed from the bank unless both agents, Taylor and Westmacott, produced their receipts, which neither would normally do unless his principal was satisfied that the terms of the agreement had been carried out. The seals affixed were a guarantee, so long as they remained intact, that the contents of the box on removal were the same as they had been on deposit. Even the loophole that Garth's agent, Westmacott, might double-cross him, since he could be bought by Taylor, and agree to go to the bank, open the box and remove the contents, and then replace his seal and Taylor's, leaving the box apparently untouched, was stopped by Garth's affixing his own seal as well—or should have been. This possibility may have been in Tommy Garth's mind from the beginning. It may well have been as a further precaution against it that he retained the key, for the key was, in effect, another seal of his own. He could not, however, guard against collusion by the bankers as well as betrayal by Westmacott, and of this, in the end, it seems he had a dreadful suspicion.

Perhaps it is a reflection on Tommy Garth that he could not produce a friend whom he could trust to act as his agent without such precautions. On the other hand, he obviously felt he had

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much at stake, and many foes. He was in fact confronted with the old, basic blackmailer's dilemma, as to whether to allow the incriminating evidence out of his possession before or only after the notes have been handed over.

Shortly afterwards, so Tommy Garth declared, he sent a list of his debts to Taylor, but after several months, and despite frequent applications, no sum of money had been paid over to him, no securities had been prepared, and no debts of his settled. Further, Sir Herbert Taylor began now to deny that any agreement had ever been entered into, and had to dispute the terms.

Finally, on December 23rd, two days before Christmas in that interesting year, Tommy Garth had finally taken fright, and had written to Taylor telling him that he had already revoked and countermanded Westmacott's authority as his agent.

On December 24th Taylor had replied. Garth was as a result thoroughly persuaded that Taylor and Westmacott intended to join in demanding the box and its contents, as they were still in possession of their receipts, and was in dread of the bankers' collusion.

On February 28th he had taken the legal means open to him of trying to protect his property and at the same time enforce the agreement. He had sworn an affidavit in the Chancery Division, setting out his complaint, swearing that the box was his and his alone, and emphasizing that it was not to be handed over to Taylor unless the terms of their agreement were carried out. Garth probably lost his nerve on realizing that the fact that he still held the key and had his seal on the box was no protection in view of the fact that Taylor and Westmacott held the only two receipts from the bank. He must have been in great anguish of mind, at once anxious to have his box back in his power, and yet realizing that as soon as that was achieved he would probably have forfeited all hope of the rewards which seemed almost within his grasp. It is perhaps possible to follow the process of reasoning which led him to the action which he took. Suspecting his erstwhile friend of double-dealing, and frantic at the prospect of Taylor's simply walking away with the basis of his blackmail, he probably took refuge in a piece of sly bullying. He would threaten disclosures. He would employ the weapon of a little unsavoury publicity, while not quite giving the show away—that he dared not do, for it would drive Taylor

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into calling off the agreement entirely. This was the only way in which Tommy Garth could bring pressure to bear on Taylor, and he seems to have grasped at it. By beginning proceedings in this way he probably meant to suggest to Sir Herbert Taylor that he had no hope of avoiding trouble by spiriting away the box of papers. Tommy Garth could thus show that he was prepared to go to the lengths of an unpleasant lawsuit, in which all the details would be given full publicity and by which he would sue Taylor for the money he had agreed to hand over in exchange for his papers.

Taylor's side of the story was that his bargain with Garth was made to ensure silence, and that Garth had broken his word and shown copies of the papers to certain editors, probably for money. Clearly, therefore, the agreement no longer held good. He also, to Garth's fury, accused him of having obtained the documents from General Garth surreptitiously and unlawfully. In disproof of this Tommy offered a letter in the General's handwriting declaring that he had originally intended the papers for his executors' eyes only, as could be seen by inscriptions on the parcels, but that he had given them to Tommy for his 'sole use and preservation', his intentions having been entirely altered for reasons already explained to his son.

Garth's behaviour certainly appears to have evoked the justifiable scorn of all, and if, as Mr. W. S. Childe-Pemberton (who wrote an authoritative-seeming footnote on the case in a book published in 1910) maintained, he 'behaved with unparalleled callousness and meanness, demanding money for silence and boasting that he was the only commoner whose parents were both of royal birth', he deserves a distinguished place in any list of blackmailers.

It is interesting to note in passing that there were two contradictory rumours abroad concerning one aspect of the story. One was to the effect that the old King, George III, had known of the birth of a child to his daughter, and that he had even written a letter about it; and the other was that it had been successfully kept from him. In the light of our own knowledge, the latter is far the more probable.

What did Charles Molloy Westmacott have to say for himself? His paper, the *Age*, while reproving the 'Old Times', for sullying its pages with scandalmongering, and calling it 'this

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filthiest of all filthy papers' and 'this bleating bell-wether of the kennel-swaggerers', threatened retribution. 'The means are in our own power, we know the men—and they are aware of it,' the *Age* fulminated, ' . . . and if they are fond of private scandal, with the blessing of Providence and our good grey goose quill, they shall have enough of it.'

More, in its columns was published the following piece of work, presumably written by Westmacott himself.

### 'REPLY TO CAPTAIN GARTH'S AFFIDAVIT

'The leading Popery journals, *The Times* and *Chronicle*, after printing pages of fiend-like slanders against an Illustrious Personage, have at last discovered a *mare's nest* by the publication of an affidavit in Chancery made by a Mr. Thomas Garth against Sir H. Taylor, and others, respecting the custody of a box of papers.

'In the first place, the statement is *ex-parte*, and therefore not entitled to credit, while it is also open to contradiction; and, secondly, we can inform *The Times* and *Chronicle*, that a *full* and *complete contradiction* to the affidavit of Captain Thomas Garth *will* and *must* appear in due course of law.

'If, however, *The Times* and *Chronicle* knew as much of the person who made the affidavit in question, and the contents of the box alluded to, as the writer of this article, *even they* would recoil with horror at his unmanly and dishonourable conduct, and blush crimson deep with shame at their own credulity in giving currency to the foulest insinuations against the Duke of Cumberland, who, we openly and *authorizedly* state, is as free from even the suspicion of any criminal knowledge of Captain Garth's birth and circumstances as the child unborn. The time may not be far distant when the seal that now binds us to honourable silence will be removed, and then we pledge ourselves to prove the truth of that which is here asserted.

'At present we shall content ourselves with saying, that with respect to the annuity proposed, Captain Garth has sworn to *double* the sum ever contemplated; that the payment of his just debts was limited to a specific sum named by him after mature consideration, and that they were, upon enquiry, found to *double* that sum; that the only impediment to the fulfilling all and every condition agreed to by the agents on both sides, arose with and



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rests entirely upon Captain Garth, who refused to reduce his prodigal expenditure and establishments, and in other respects fulfil the preliminary conditions of the arrangements.

‘To sum up all, it was timely discovered that he, Captain Garth, had *violated* his sacred word of honour as a soldier and a gentleman, given in the presence of two persons, with respect to the papers. That he had, even during the negotiation, outraged the common feelings of decency and affection; and to complete his character, had endeavoured to *impose* large sums upon the persons appointed to inspect and liquidate his debts, which had neither been incurred nor were justly due.

‘These are only a few of the facts of the case, but they are such as Captain Garth or his agents dare not deny, without meeting with a summary and substantial contradiction.

‘With respect to the box of papers, there has never been *any application* made to the bankers, nor *any intention* displayed by the parties in whose name it is lodged, to remove it, although up to this moment there is no legal impediment to their doing so.

‘The deposit was made with Messrs Paul, Snow and Paul, in the ordinary way of business, they being Mr. Westmacott’s bankers; they were neither mediators, negotiators nor parties in any way to the transaction; nor were they consulted upon, or made acquainted with, the contents of the box.

‘The tale of the two receipts is equally false as the motive given by Captain Garth for depositing the box in Mr. Westmacott’s name in lieu of his own; the latter had previously possession of the box, and at Captain Garth’s request, had made himself fully acquainted with all its contents, by preparing a corrected abstract of the whole, for a purpose which Captain Garth abandoned at Mr. Westmacott’s request.’ Garth himself declared that Westmacott had frequently urged him to publish them, and that he had as often refused. ‘Such abstract is still remaining with, and has never been out of Mr. Westmacott’s possession.

‘In conclusion, we have only to say that we regard Captain Garth as the most contemptible of human beings; and *we know*, and the public *will shortly know* too, that the Duke of Cumberland is, with respect to the late insinuations about Captain Garth, the most injured man in His Majesty’s dominions.

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‘By way of postscript we may add that none of the parties who are made to appear as defendants in this case have yet received any notice, legal or otherwise, of the proceedings in Chancery, although we understand the application for an injunction was made before the Lord Chancellor during the past week in his private room, and *refused*.’

General Garth, whose ‘death-bed’ revelations may have detonated the explosion, recovered, but not for long. A year after Captain Garth had been making his so-promising agreement with Taylor, and less than nine months after the scandal had rocked the country, the old man died. The date was November 17th, 1829. He was eighty-five. His will was dated September 12th of the same year.

Sir Herbert Taylor received a letter from his friend, Charles Greenwood, written the day after the event.

‘Craig’s Court

‘Nov. 18, 1829

‘My dear Taylor,

‘The name of Garth must be hateful to you, and I know not whether the event I have to communicate to you will be productive of relief to you, or of more trouble. I should fear the latter.

‘Genl. Garth died last night in his son’s [*sic*, his] house in Grosvenor Place, and expired in his son’s arms. He was perfectly aware that he was dying, and embraced his son with the greatest tenderness, told him that he had left him all he had, and was sorry that it was no more. This intelligence comes to me from a person that was present at the scene, but nothing seems to have been said relating to the Captain’s particular situation—at any rate, I have stated all that has been told to me.

Ever, my dear Taylor,

Truly & affectionately yours,

CHA: GREENWOOD

‘This event will I conclude be the means of a summons to you, and I shall soon see you in town.’

The funeral took place at St. Martin-in-the-Fields ten days later, on November 27th. Captain Garth was the chief mourner.

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The *Gentleman's Magazine* printed an obituary notice of the General, commenting that 'Recent unfortunate circumstances have made the marriage of General Garth with a lady of illustrious birth much more notorious than the parties desired. The issue of the marriage was one son, who bears his father's name, and is a Captain in the army.'

Mr. Greenwood was wrong in saying that the General had left Captain Garth 'all he had'.

By his will the General left to his *nephew*, Captain Thomas Garth, a Captain in the Royal Navy, and not the army, his estates in Northumberland—an action which might support the belief that *our* Thomas Garth was not actually of the Garth blood. (Incidentally, Captain Thomas Garth, R.N., was often confused, not only in his lifetime but after his death, with his worthless cousin of the same name. Tommy's old school, Harrow, had still got him on record as having become a captain in the navy, in 1957.)

On the other hand, by the will the General directed his trustees to pay to his 'son' and that son's lawful issue, a moiety of an annuity of £3,000 granted by Charles II. Nine years before his death the General had already made a deed of settlement, by which he had settled it on himself, and in certain events on his son. Only if Tommy Garth had no issue was the moiety to go to the naval nephew.

To Tommy Garth he also left his house, No. 32 Grosvenor Place, 'lately purchased from Sir Henry Hardinge', together with plate, household furniture, and personal effects, 'in the said house, and in and about the estate at Piddletown'. The rest of the property went to the naval Captain.

Arising out of the phraseology in the will is a point worth passing attention, for the General there refers to Tommy Garth as 'my son'. In law a beneficiary can only be the testator's son if the testator has legally been married to the beneficiary's mother. If he has not, then the son is not the same person as the beneficiary named, and the gift might well be void for uncertainty. However, human beings being what they are, especially in the matter of making wills, there is no need to assume that the old General suddenly became prescient in the minutiae of the construction of documents when he wanted to refer to the boy he had always called his son. As his son and his nephew were both

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called Thomas Garth he would, besides, be anxious to use some descriptive term which would distinguish one Thomas from his cousin—and what more natural than to call him his son?

We are not much the wiser after considering the will, nor were we meant to be. It does not seem, however, that this 'son' occupied quite the position of solitary honour one might have expected had he been the only, true son, of an outstandingly affectionate father, even if he were born on the wrong side of the blanket.

In March 1830, exactly a year after Tommy Garth's affidavit had been sworn in Chancery, Sir Herbert Taylor received the following letter:

'45 Wigmore Street  
18th March, 1830

'Sir,

'In consequence of a circular letter I attended a meeting of Captain Garth's creditors yesterday, where a representation was made that he was successfully prosecuting his suit against you, and which was being done for their benefit, but that some of his creditors were proceeding to outlawry against him, the consequence of which would be to put an end to the suit against you, and of course prevent the possibility of his ever being able to pay any of them a single shilling.

'The creditors appeared willing to consent, but I proposed an adjournment for a few days to consider the question. The parties—at least two of them—who are proceeding with the outlawry are friends of mine, and I should feel most happy if at the next meeting I could turn them the way which would be most agreeable to your wish and which should be done if I knew what that wish was. With great respect, I am, Sir, your very humble servant,

'WILLIAM CONNELL'

The legal sanction referred to in the letter, now abolished, was available against judgment debtors such as Tommy Garth, who wilfully avoided the execution of the process of the Courts. It put the outlaw literally outside the law, depriving him of legal recognition as well as of all rights of property, and thus inevitably also depriving his creditors of any hope of getting their money by process of law.

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Those creditors who had not been induced to take proceedings for the outlawry, and who presumably preferred money to revenge against Garth, could see their chances of being paid rapidly disappearing. As they became more and more concerned it either occurred, or was suggested to them, that Sir Herbert Taylor was the man who, by paying the money he had promised as the price of silence, could most easily make possible a settlement of Garth's debts. However, Mr. William Connell at least felt that he needed reliable confirmation of the likelihood of this. He did not get it.

To Mr. Connell's letter Sir Herbert coldly replied that he 'could not interfere in any matter respecting Captain Garth or his concerns'.

Today little trace remains of the wild extravagances and dissipations of Captain Thomas Garth at his establishment at Melton Mowbray, which caused the old General much pain, and made Sir Herbert Taylor anxious to have it broken up, besides the formal entries in the plump docket books at the Public Record Office of those seeking judgment against him for debt or trespass. They do not convey much to us of the passions and the heart-burning which that remarkable young man seems to have evoked in the breasts of those who had anything to do with him.



PART VI

*The Man of Honour*





## CHAPTER 21

### *The Villain*

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What was there to the assertions, veiled or open, that the Duke of Cumberland was the father of Thomas Garth?

It was widely believed at the time that this was so. The Duke was a very unpopular man, perhaps the most hated man in England, and few found it difficult to imagine him in the rôle. It may be repaying to look at this man, as he appeared to the people of England, and even to some others more closely associated with him.

A cold, hostile, clever little boy, always peering and pushing his short-sighted way into other people's affairs, he never won the affection of his family, even of sisters noted for their gushing adoration of their other brothers. He was always a trouble-maker, and Wellington was to say of him, 'There was never a father with his son, or husband with his wife, or lover with his mistress, or a friend with his friend, that he did not try to make mischief between them.' His brother, William IV, put it more succinctly: 'If anyone has a corn, Ernest is sure to tread on it.' His young niece, Princess Charlotte, had an almost hysterical fear and dread of him. To her he was 'an evil genius', 'the har-binger of mischief', 'a bird of the *most fatal* omen'. He was 'never without a plan', and she prayed for 'an *absence for ever*' from his '*too baneful*' influence. 'I must say he has no *heart nor honor*,' she wrote, 'but a deep, dark, vindictive and malicious minde, brooding over mischief, and always active in the pursuit of everything that is bad.' He was such a spy, she reported on the evidence of one of his kindlier critics, that 'he would sit up whole nights to find out anything he wanted'. He was 'very odious with his indecent jokes', and his language was not 'of the choicest sort'. From Windsor she informed her friend, 'You can

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have no idea how the Duke of Cumberland is hated by all here, and how they dread his ever coming here.'

The skinny little boy of the West picture grew into a tall, skeletal man, silent and sneering and watchful, totally unlike his flabby, rotund, good-natured and garrulous brothers, with a countenance people found as repulsive as his character. Stockmar called him 'a tall, powerful man, with a hideous face; can't see two inches before him; one eye turned quite out of its place'. This disfigurement was the result of battle wounds early in his manhood. His portraits present us with the handsome profile which survived this disaster (when they do not positively deceive us as to the truth) but in real life Ernest's vanity could effect no more than could be achieved by growing luxuriant whiskers and mustachios, German fashion. The British put this down merely to his love of all things foreign and hated him for it. (Princess Charlotte, not affectionately, called him 'Prince Wiskerandos'.) His compatriots, had they been able to look into the future, would have found no difficulty in accepting the fact that descendants of his in Hanover, of which he became King Ernest I, would fight, first for the Kaiser and then for Hitler, in two wars against England.

In Hanover, where he had been educated, it was believed, he had been able to indulge to the full his natural delight in violence. Drunk with admiration of the Prussian military machine, he had hastened to don uniform and plunge into the bloodthirsty rites of war. He was made for the jackboot, at home with the sabre, a born rider down of the *sansculottes*.

He had joined eagerly in the savage hand-to-hand fighting for which his commission in a Hanoverian regiment gave him so much opportunity. Back at the front, after a mere four months at home to recuperate from terrible wounds to an arm and eye, leading his regiment with a broken sabre, he had once torn a French dragoon from his horse and carried him bodily back to the British lines a prisoner. A brave man certainly, but one, too, who showed a positive delight in war, with which the English did not sympathize.

In so far as he had enjoyed spilling the blood of French fighters for the ideals of liberty he had been an effective soldier; but the moment his sword was temporarily replaced in its scabbard he had turned the pugnacity of his nature upon his superior officers.

## THE VILLAIN

Truculent and arrogant, taking unfair advantage of his royal status, hysterically touchy about his 'honour', he had made life so impossible for the leadership of the army that he had had, with his father's connivance, to be relegated to the rear.

Behind the lines he had been even more of a menace. Gallantry was one thing, outrage another. His royal brothers had known where to take their dishonourable attentions. Cumberland continually offended innocence. Even Lady Harcourt (Countess Harcourt's sister-in-law, whose husband was then serving abroad as a general), determined as she was to be fond of him, had not been able to conceal her disgust when he affronted the modesty of the abbess and nuns of a convent which he once honoured with a visit as a young man of twenty-two. She had called him 'too wild for England'—and England was not squeamish in those days.

When he had eventually, much against the will of the King, made the first of his many disastrous descents from the Continent upon the unhappy land of his birth, the royal family had been able to parade his wounds before those of their subjects who were mourning their dead or nursing their war-wounded. At such times only could his relations be proud of him and happy in him.

For the rest, he was, as he remained for his whole life, abhorrent to all decent British people. Much as he hated his father, he had never been able to make common cause with his brothers, all united though they were against the King, and they all quarrelled with him. Like some spiritual pariah, so universally execrated was he, even before he had shown his mettle in accomplished political and moral vileness, that his father was able to refrain from making him a duke until he was twenty-eight.

Till then he had been politically neutralized; but as soon as he had taken his seat in the House of Lords he was able to embark upon a career which he soon came to find as satisfying in its way as he had done the licensed carnage of war—politics.

His first speech had been merely in support of adultery. He spoke against the Adultery Bill to prevent the marriage of guilty parties to a divorce, sneering that, 'so few men are inclined to marry the woman they have seduced that it would be cruel to deprive the females of this last hope'.

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That had been, however, a gentle preliminary canter, in preparation for charges spreading widespread ruin and destruction.

After that his army career had been but a purely recreational indulgence in supervising the regiment of which he was nominally Colonel-in-Chief. It was a hobby which enabled him to strike officers who had no hope of redress, to exercise a savage discipline, and to maintain in his regiment alone of all the army the obsolete punishment of picqueting, or keeping a man standing for hours on a pointed stake. It had allowed him to career about the countryside planting the servile German troops he preferred to English soldiers at points of vantage, in high glee at the prospect of some local blood-letting if Napoleon should invade England.

In politics, thenceforth his main concern, any thought of freedom or progress had always been anathema to him. If there was a group of people which inspired him with greater revulsion than the liberal or radical *canaille* (for he sometimes swore in French, though he usually spoke German), it was that of the Roman Catholics. He had therefore encumbered the opposers of Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary reform with his support.

That it was an encumbrance there can be no doubt. Time and again the public had its attention drawn to some new spectacle of degradation presented by the noble Duke, the champion of reaction.

The newspapers and diarists of the time present us with a grisly catalogue of the Duke's exploits. It would, presumably, have been shortened, in the case of any but a royal duke, by the restraint of the asylum, the gaol, or the gallows.

On May 30, 1810, the public was in no doubt, the Duke of Cumberland had murdered his faithful valet Sellis, who had surprised him in his mirror-hung bedroom in St. James's Palace indulging in unspeakable vice with his other valet, Neale—or, alternatively, in straightforward adultery with Mrs. Sellis, who had borne the duke a child.

In the year 1813 he had had to be packed off to the Continent after the exposure by a committee of the House of Commons of his corrupt practices in the Weymouth election.

In the year 1829 (after the outbreak of the Tommy Garth scandal) he attempted to rape Lady Lyndhurst, wife of the Lord

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Chancellor, and then, to make matters worse, had proceeded to lecture her on politics for two or three hours.

Only six months later he had driven the unhappy Lord Graves to commit suicide by a well-publicized affair with his wife.

He was hissed whenever recognized in the streets, insulted on public placards, stoned, and, once, dragged from his horse by a mob outside the House of Lords.

The woman (German, of course) whom he had married, had been engaged to his younger brother Cambridge, was rumoured to have murdered both her previous husbands, and was notorious for her flagrant immorality. The Queen and princesses had refused to receive her when her third husband brought her to England, and Queen Charlotte did not relent even on her death-bed. Parliament, with a rancour that was unwonted against royal dukes, however scandalous their behaviour, had denied him the usual marriage settlement. One member had declared that 'whatever respect he might feel for the rest of the royal family, that respect did not extend to the Duke of Cumberland', and that 'no person could go into society of any kind without having that opinion supported'. Further, he had held that the marriage was 'an improper one, however much the parties might be suited to each other from their habits and morals'. Nobody minded the Prince of Wales's succession of loves, the Duke of York's Mrs. Cary and Mrs. Clarke, the Duke of Clarence's Mrs. Jordan and her numerous illegitimate children, the Duke of Kent's French 'Madame', or the Duke of Sussex's illegal 'wives'. It was all good clean fun. The exploits of the Duke of Cumberland, on the other hand, in the matters of sex and marriage, were universally held to be nasty. His affairs reeked with nameless wickednesses. They must be stopped. It was not so much that he was immoral, but that he was also vicious and decadent.

Later still, Parliament would refuse to grant him an allowance for his son's education unless he left him behind in England to be brought up outside his father's influence.

This man, Englishmen were convinced, was ambitious enough to wish to lead the Opposition, and to hope to be Prime Minister of England. He was unscrupulous enough to be prepared to murder the Princess Victoria, if he could, so as to succeed to the throne after his seedy brothers George IV and William IV had

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gone to their graves. He was clever enough to gain an intolerable influence over his eldest brother, George IV, though that weak king really hated him and frequently wished him dead or banished. He was unpatriotic enough for King William to raise his glass, pointedly, in his presence, to propose 'The land we live in, and let those who don't like it leave it!'

This villain, this worthy great-nephew of 'Butcher' Cumberland, and worthy nephew of Anne Horton's Duke, had his gay moments. He was always a great practical joker at the expense of helpless women and on one occasion when riding over Hammersmith Bridge he took it into his head to play a light-hearted prank upon two young girls, the Misses Perfect, who were walking there. He set his horse at them, and then, with the expertise of a cavalryman, he harried the terrified creatures against the railings. To show that it was all in sport, he rode off cackling with demoniacal laughter.

Tom Moore wrote a poem to express the people's feelings about this incident, with a refrain of 'Galloping, dreary Duke'.

Cumberland had his tender moments too. As an old man, firmly established on the throne of the servile kingdom of Hanover, which he had secured against revolution by the ruthless suppression of popular opinion, and the expulsion from the University of Liberal thinkers such as the brothers Grimm of the fairy tales, he would dangle his grandson on his knee.

'The old King used to put out his great tongue,' to quote Mr. Roger Fulford, 'and the child then bathed its face and hands in the Royal saliva.' (Cumberland, who once said, apropos of Sir Robert Peel, that 'When you have not been born or bred a gentleman you cannot expect noble ideas or feelings', would have appreciated that capital R to royal in juxtaposition to the following noun.)

That then, was the Duke of Cumberland as the British saw him.

Of him Charles Greville wrote in his diary:

'There was never such a man, or behaviour so atrocious as his—a mixture of narrow-mindedness, selfishness, truckling, blustering, and duplicity, with no object but self, his own ease, and the gratification of his own fancies and prejudices, without regard to the advice and opinion of the wisest and best-informed men or to the interests and tranquillity of the country.' He

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considered him 'brutal and offensive', and 'the most audacious villain in the world and totally without fear or shame'.

This was the man on whose death the leader writer of *The Times* wrote:

'Death has knocked at the door of a royal palace . . .

'If we measured our observations by the charitable canon of the proverb [*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*], the remarks we could now offer would be scant indeed, for the good to be said of the royal dead is little or none . . . Prince Ernest partook neither in disposition nor sympathies of that character by which our countrymen are distinguished, nor could we convey a better idea of the portrait before us than by describing it as that of a bad German prince of the last century. He was wholly German; German in features, German in tastes, German in principles, and German in manners . . . the manly stature, undaunted bearing, and notorious intrepidity of the young Prince Ernest found a certain favour in the eyes of volunteers and militiamen; but when thews and sinews ceased to be appreciated, and brute courage became less marketable, the fame of the royal duke declined . . . With the qualities of stubbornness and valour his royal virtues may be said to have terminated.

'The duke treated popular opinion with a ferocity of contempt which could scarcely be surpassed at St. Petersburg or Warsaw. In his pleasures he asserted the license of an Orleans or a Stuart, and . . . rumour persisted in attaching to his excesses a certain criminal blackness below the standard dye of aristocratic debauchery. [Though] a man so universally obnoxious should have suffered to some extent from . . . calumny . . . the impartial historian, however, will be likely to decide that there was little in the known character of Prince Ernest to exempt him from sore suspicions touching what remained concealed . . .

'It must ever be recognized among the greatest of England's blessings that qualities so repugnant to British feeling were never united in one person with a lawful title to the British Crown . . .

'That the Duke of Cumberland can be regretted by the people of England is more than the most resolute eulogist of royalty could venture to affirm . . . It was a fortunate circumstance for all parties which transferred the departed prince from the British House of Peers to the hereditary kingdom of his ancestors . . .

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The King of Hanover had outlived some of the vices of the Duke of Cumberland, and Germans brought a less rigorous judgment than Englishmen to the politics and morals of their prince. A bad English peer made a respectable German sovereign . . . As kings, indeed, are computed on the continent, he was an able and even popular monarch, and his memory may find, perhaps, in his ancestral dominions a sympathy which it would be vain to bespeak for it in the scenes of his manhood or the land of his birth.'

\* \* \*

That was the Duke of Cumberland in whom England believed, and whom England loathed. It would not be surprising if he had added to the list of his abominable crimes the ultimate one against his innocent sister, Sophia.

Among the papers in the box, as Greville also heard (though indirectly) that Sir Herbert Taylor had said, were letters from the Princess Sophia to General Garth complaining that the Duke had attempted to assault her. He also said, in this connection, we may remember, that it was notorious that the old Queen had forbidden the Duke's access to the apartments of the Princesses.

Some have found some support for this theory in a little reference to the Duke of Cumberland in a letter from the Princess Sophia to Lady Harcourt which is included in the Harcourt papers. It was written from Weymouth on August 24th, 1794, six years before the birth of Tommy Garth, when Sophia was not yet seventeen and Prince Ernest was twenty-three.

'Believe me,' it runs, 'my Dearest Lady Harcourt, I shall ever remember with pleasure the last conversation we had together, and I shall do all I can to follow the good advice you gave me.' Then after a few sentences it goes on, 'Dear Ernest is as kind to me as it is possible, rather a little imprudent at times, but when told of it never takes it ill.'

Taken in conjunction with the detailed stories of the gossips, such as Greville, Creevey and Glenbervie, the affidavit and the astonishingly forthright articles and letters in the newspapers, which were never rebutted by a royal family particularly touchy on the point of newspaper libels, to say nothing of the corroborative 'evidence' of Miss Ham, and the very special hatred and revulsion Princess Charlotte and her family seemed to bear



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towards Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, this is enough for some. Then, they feel, Princess Caroline of Wales had plenty of opportunity to find out the truth of such a scandal, and she was able to quote the Duke of York, Sophia's closest and life-long friend, as her authority. Such people believe, with *The Times*, that only a scandal of such proportions could have involved the discussion of the exchange of amounts of money as considerable as those in issue.

Was Garth not simply a cloak for a royal catastrophe of the first order? (His own family believe today that he was a cloak for someone.) Did he perhaps have a grievance, feeling that he had sacrificed himself to little purpose, and literally been left holding the baby? It is possible, and his behaviour to Princess Charlotte in 1814 may even suggest that he may have thought himself to have been insufficiently rewarded for his years of loyalty and devotion. The attitude of the rest of the family, if it resembled hers, seems to have been to get the child out of the way as quickly as possible and thereafter to ignore its abominable existence. Other royal children not acknowledged by the Court evidently felt entitled to rather more attention than Tommy Garth received, and some were to fare better than he did. William IV was to bestow an earldom on his eldest son by Mrs. Jordan a year after his succession, and only a year or two after the 1829 scandal, and to load his other sons with rank, money and favours. Sussex's D'Este son would begin his efforts to claim succession to his father's dukedom in the same year. The General might well have resented the treatment accorded his 'protegee'. He may have considered that he and his Tommy, both innocent victims, deserved more than contemptuous and stony silence. He had certainly made vigorous efforts to draw more from one whom he expected would one day occupy the throne and thus be in a position to be more generous if the way was shown her.

Did Garth, feeling thus, induce Tommy to try and wrest something tangible from the royal family? Did he, or Tommy, approach the pro-Cumberland, anti-popery Westmacott, and agree to abstain from publicity which would injure Cumberland and his political party if he would act as agent in an effort to extort money from the royal family?

Those who believe Cumberland to have been the kind of man

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depicted in this chapter do not find such a suggestion impossible to accept. And they point to yet another passage from the ubiquitous Glenbervie which, if true, reveals that Princess Charlotte knew more than she said in her letters to Mercer Elphinstone. (There is nothing in the letters to show that she and her friend had not previously discussed the matter, either.)

Glenbervie writes from the Crown Inn, at Sevenoaks, at a quarter past noon, on Monday 21st October, 1811.

'On a former day when the daughter [Princess Caroline's daughter, Princess Charlotte] dined at Kensington, before Lady Glenbervie came into waiting she asked Miss Garth [General Garth's niece] how William [i.e. Thomas] did, and what was to be done with him. "I suppose," says she, "he will be in the army—in the 15th——" smiling visibly.

'Miss Garth looked grave—"Oh," says the Princess, "I know all that perfectly!"

'It is shocking, very shocking!—I am not sure whether I have mentioned above, the report that first the Taylor [*sic*? the tailor or Sir Herbert Taylor] and then General Garth were only cloaks, and that this mysterious William [*sic*] is the Duke of Cumberland's, who is Colonel of the 15th Dragoons.'

## CHAPTER 22

### *The Man of Honour*

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It is only of comparatively recent years that anyone has found anything good to say of Ernest, Duke of Cumberland. In the last twenty years or so, however, two biographies of this strange man have been put out, both from the same publishing house. One would not be surprised to find the melodramatic figure of villainy somewhat whittled down in the new examination. However, one *is* surprised, even startled, to find emerging someone we are asked to believe approached heroic, if not saintly, stature. The latest biography, published in 1954, by Mr. G. M. Willis, is a painstaking work, and its author has obviously had the benefit of an enormous amount of material at his disposal, a great deal of it from the archives in Hanover. Under his hands Cumberland sheds his unpleasant characteristics like the prince in the fairy tale emerging from his donkey-skin disguise.

Let us, then, turn away the scarred, disfigured profile and look for a moment on the handsome, distinguished one, which represents the man as these more recent biographers now seem to wish us to regard him. (That is no unsuitable metaphor, since the cruellest scars on Cumberland's reputation were as much the result of warfare as those on his face; only the warfare was political, not military.)

This Cumberland was, simply, a fine man, intelligent, gifted, sensitive, upright, and honourable. More, he was moderation itself, abstemious, just and gracious. Far from being malignant and truculent, he was patient and forbearing to a fault, though he would fight to the death for a principle, throwing his own interests aside with hardly a regret. Duty, loyalty, and courage were his watchwords.

This Cumberland was deeply religious. He had, as he himself said, imbibed 'a sound foundation of true religion', from his

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father, and to the end of his life he undertook nothing of moment without prayer.

The cleverest of the brothers, as Sophia was of the sisters, he shone too in more demanding circles, for he had outstanding abilities. For the brief period during which Fate left his handsome face unmarred, he was a striking, immaculately elegant figure. More, he was charming, and lovable. General Harcourt's wife, who saw much of him, spoke often of his goodness and kindness. She called him 'open, lively, and very good-natured', and said, 'The more I see of Prince Ernest the more I like him . . . I never knew a better temper or a kinder heart.'

True, he was born to be a soldier. 'From the bottom of my soul I am a soldier, and by honour I know nothing else,' he wrote to his eldest brother, and to his father he said that in his opinion a soldier's life was 'the best and finest in the world'. It went very deep with him, this ambition which had existed from his earliest nursery days, and once when (in a desperate attempt to make his father take him seriously at a crux in his army career) he put on "a fine civilian court dress", and appeared before him at a drawing-room, the effect on the prince was far more destructive than on the King. 'I will never', he wrote, 'forget my nausea and horror as I saw this cursed dress on my body, so that I almost wept when I saw myself in it.'

Prince Ernest was an excellent soldier, too. 'The prince is beloved and thought a good officer,' wrote Lady Harcourt. He was popular with his men, and they would have followed him anywhere. He was as devoted to them as they were to him. 'The fellows know that I am vastly attached to them,' he wrote, and, again, 'There is not a more distinguished, and, what is more, a more gentleman-like corps of officers, and the idea of soon being obliged to quit them makes my heart bleed.'

Ernest was brave. Even the writer of *The Times* obituary did not attempt to deny his physical courage. The inspiring feat which rang round the world, when unarmed he had taken his cavalryman prisoner, was only one of many examples of his intrepidity. Nor was he staunch only on the field of battle. Prince Ernest slept hard, and bore sickness, starvation and cold, as well as dire wounds, unflinchingly. He went through the terrible Walcheren expedition, when the water turned to ice in

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the men's eyes and they were frozen as they slept, uncomplainingly. When unfit to serve he fretted at being left in camp 'a cripple'.

'Prince Ernest will go, lame as he is,' Lady Harcourt lamented; 'think of the danger of riding with one arm in a sling, increased as it is by his not seeing ten yards before him.'

There is evidence that this, though a bold one, was also a gentle knight, a far cry from the ogre who enjoyed bloodshed for its own sake whom his countrymen believed him to be. In his letters he wrote how, riding over the field after a battle, 'seeing the spilt blood, my heart bled', and he was careful to explain that it was only in order to save his own life that he had found himself 'necessitated to take the life of a French chasseur'. As a convalescent invalid at home he not only leapt into the Thames to save the life of 'an unfortunate, desponding suicide', but afterwards set him on his feet financially.

Ernest's conception of what being a soldier implied had never been a low one. His was a noble ideal of the soldierly virtues combined with Christian ones: unflinching courage in the face of moral or physical danger; fortitude and endurance when hard beset; devotion to the highest standards of duty, honesty, loyalty, chivalry; and, of course, patriotism. His attitude to poor weak women, as shown in his speech on the Adultery Bill, spoke of pity, sympathy and a Christian spirit of forgiveness.

It was those standards, those standards of a simple Christian soldier; which Cumberland took with him into civil life. He took them too into the world of complicated men, of compromise, of warring interests and subtle distinctions, of politics. It could be maintained that it was his simple virtues, and not any peculiar and demoniacal vices, which caused him to become unpopular. Cumberland may have been too idealistic, too undeviating where he believed a matter of principle to be at stake, and tragically incapable of compromise in any affair involving conscience. Conservative about his religion, almost impossibly touchy about and obsessively preoccupied with, his honour (a word which glitters from every letter and every speech of his, public or private, with a splendid but ominous reiteration), determined at all costs to guard the old order against change, since he saw himself as the last bastion of sanity and order in the rising tide of anarchy and revolution, he was bound to offend people with

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powerful interests. They had ways of taking their revenge and knew where to take it—by besmirching his cherished reputation.

Politically he took up an uncompromising position. His father's family had been brought over from its kingdom of Hanover to secure the Protestant succession. His father's right to rule depended entirely upon his observance of his coronation oath, and any cession to the Roman Catholics would be a direct betrayal of it.

Politically Cumberland's judgment may be questioned; and it undoubtedly gained for him the relentless and active hatred of the Whigs, and lost him the support of even his fellow Tories, who considered it expedient to modify their former views. Morally, it was unimpeachable.

It was easy for Cumberland's enemies to paint him as a dyed-in-the-wool Protestant, and a reactionary. It was not difficult for them to spread the smear that he found his spiritual home in the hated land of Germany. This must have been a particularly underhand blow, for he loved the land of his birth deeply and tenderly, and consciously. England to him was 'old England'. During his exile his heart ached perpetually for the 'sweet scents of my little cottage at Kew', and to the end of his long life he dwelt nostalgically on memories of life about Kew Green, with the beadle tending the flocks and herds, the little Queen Anne church, and the servants in scarlet liveries on the grass and under the ancient trees. Though he served his Hanoverian people well, he sometimes (with a somewhat typical lack of tact) snubbed them by making it clear that it was duty, and not love, which led him to devote himself to them, and he continually insulted them by unfavourable comparisons with English ways.

It is ironical, and sad, that he should have infuriated the English by appearing so German, and the Germans by being so English. The English needed only the peg of the luxuriant whiskers and moustaches, so noticeable in a land of clean-shaven men, and his Germanized English, neither of which were mere whims of his—sent to his German University at fifteen, forbidden to speak English, and refused a visit home for eight years, it would have been odd if Cumberland's idiom and accent had been otherwise than they were—on which to hang their picture of him. Yet, even after a decade of ruling his little German kingdom, he did not seem as complete a German as his enemies

would have us believe. It was an Englishman who, in the last year of the old King's life, described him as 'as magnificent a specimen of an English gentleman as I ever saw'.

And his morals? 'I am neither a methodist, saint or psalm-singer,' he once said of himself, but there does not seem to be any evidence which proves him worse than his brothers in this respect. There *is* evidence, however, that he made a good and loving husband to the unhappy woman he married, and that she returned his devotion with adoration. Widowed young, and unhappily remarried to a man who had seduced her, she was a weak, perhaps an immoral, woman, but no murderess. The attitude of Queen Charlotte seems to have been unbending and perhaps unjust, and that of Parliament quite monstrous. With characteristic staunchness Cumberland refused to visit his mother unaccompanied by his wife, and wrote, 'Certainly you could not respect or esteem me . . . No, such a conduct on my part would merit my being scouted by all men.'

When away from his 'dearest angel' he would write her letters of up to eighty pages every two or three days, and when she died he was inconsolable.

'Alas, alas, all my happiness in this world is *finished* . . . for me, all is lost, for I can say that I lived only for her . . . oh, my misery is great, the world holds nothing more for me.'

Like his great-grandfather before him, he kept his wife's rooms as they were, even to her bottle of eau de cologne, and, with candles lit and servants in attendance, he went to sit in them every evening. Even the Countess Von Grote, whom he established at his court three years later, was more a nurse than a mistress to the old man.

'When it is said that time cures everything, believe me, this is not true . . . When one retires and is alone, one feels one's grief thricefold.'

What, then, of the many scandals which were affixed to Cumberland's name during his lifetime? Political motives could account for them all.

One has only to look into the known facts of the 'Sellis murder' case to see how unjustly he was blamed. The coroner's jury, which made an immediate and prolonged investigation into the incident (under the chairmanship of an avowed enemy of Cumberland's, incidentally) found that Sellis had committed

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suicide after attempting to murder his master. The Duke's own frightful injuries, supposed by some accounts to be self-inflicted, exposed the pulsating brain and nearly caused his death. Pursued by rumour, the Duke, after twenty-two years of patience, brought an action for libel against a Radical publisher who repeated the accusation of murder for a revolting motive, and won it. The jury found for the Duke without retiring, and the publisher went to prison. Even after such a lapse of time Cumberland's wounds bore mute evidence in his favour.

As to Lady Lyndhurst, the Duke himself suspected that she had been deliberately thrown in his way by his political enemies in order to compromise him. Princess Lieven, a cynic and woman of the world, not over-disposed to be charitable to anyone, believed him innocent and wronged. Creevey, too, wrote of the lady in question at the very time, 'She has beautiful eyes, and such a way of using them that has quite shocked Lady Louisa and me'—a description not incompatible with naughtiness. Nothing was proved. All was rumour.

As to the incident of the Misses Perfect on Hammersmith Bridge, the Duke had an alibi—he was shooting, miles away, at the time—and an officer of his believed that he might himself have been the unwitting culprit. The scandal had been started by a letter to the press by a well-known local Radical.

Lady Graves, his supposed *inamorata*, according to Princess Lieven, was over fifty, the mother of thirteen, and wore spectacles. While none of these facts suggest that she was an impossible target for Hanoverian passion, they do at least make her an improbable one. Then, Lord Graves himself had written a letter declaring his belief in his wife's innocence before cutting his throat.

The calumny raged, with all the others, old and new, in the spring of the year 1829, when the Duke's enemies were full of panic at his arrival in England in order to fight the supporters of Catholic Emancipation. They were almost certainly all the result of strong efforts made to drive Cumberland out of the country. That his opponents were unscrupulous Cumberland was but too well aware.

'It is disgusting to live in a country where every man's character is at the mercy of hirelings who, to carry out any purpose or gratify any party motive, can insinuate the greatest



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lies against anyone,' the Duke wrote to Lord Eldon, his friend. 'This is in fact but a second volume of all that took place *last year*, and at the self-same *moment* just as the meeting of Parliament took place.' In the end *The Times* withdrew its implications that Cumberland had murdered Graves (as well as Sellis), and apologized for 'that article which we thundered out . . . which caused so great a sensation'.

The scandalmongers had mistaken their man. Cumberland's courage was not only for the field.

'If you think me to be such a damned coward as to run away,' was his forthright reply to them, 'by God, I am *not*, and will face that and every other false and infamous libel and cabal!'

And he sent for his wife and son to join him in England.

Others beside himself recognized the motive behind the campaign of slanders. A letter from Princess Lieven to her brother, written from London in March of 1829, puts it all in perspective.

'Nothing fresh here—unless it be the revival of a scandal, warmed up and renewed, and almost brought into the Law Courts with the object of throwing dirt upon the royal family, but more especially of forcing the Duke of Cumberland out of the country—a satisfaction he will not give to those who seem most to desire it.

'A certain Captain Garth passes—or allows himself to pass—as the son of Princess Sophia, the King's sister. The promise through someone connected with the Court of a sum of money, and the eager desire to obtain possession of certain letters, show pretty clearly that the royal family is interested in the matter. This latter point is to be settled in a Court of Law—so far there is something undeniable—but the other point is conjectural.

'This Captain Garth pretends that these letters prove that the Duke of Cumberland is his father, and at the same time that the Princess Sophia was his mother. Whatever opinion one may have as to the truth of this infamous calumny, the royal family is bespattered, for the newspapers daily discuss the affair before the public, some supporting and others denying it. The much desired outcome, however, will not happen. The Duke of Cumberland remains, and all the more will remain, for his honour obliges him now not to have the air of being intimidated by this terrible charge.

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‘With this the Catholic question is being pushed forward simultaneously . . .’

On the Lady Graves affair the Princess commented later that Lord Graves himself had been convinced that ‘there was absolutely nothing but calumny in the matter, having for its political object to damage still further the Duke’s reputation’, but, she realized, any gossip about Cumberland (‘he is the most widely hated man in England’) was enough to ensure public interest.

‘It is impossible to describe the sensation produced by this catastrophe: but not a man in his senses saw aught but absurdity in such an allegation [that Lord Graves had been, in effect, murdered by Cumberland] . . . In any case, however, the catastrophe . . . has in this case drawn down on the head of the Duke of Cumberland a storm of hatred and abuse the like of which one has never heard. It is, however, something of a small triumph for Ministers, who have so much reason to be delighted that they are suspected, not altogether without cause, of having stimulated the horrible things said against the Duke. For him the consequences must be most serious, and his friends have advised him not to attempt to face the storm, as they believe that he would be stoned by the populace if he were to show himself.’

Neither calumnies nor stones from the mob could ever shake Cumberland. It was no idle boast of his when he said of himself, ‘They may as well move St. Paul’s to this place as get me to *finch!*’ But even his courage was helpless before the weapons used by his enemies. His reputation was ruined in England, and irrevocably.

In Hanover, on the other hand, Cumberland was a beloved father of his people, a wise and equitable monarch, the only one in Europe to maintain his throne unshaken in the terrible convulsions which toppled so many other kings from theirs. He was not expected to last long as king of the troubled kingdom he inherited, but his rule was so successful that even his enemies could not deny the fact.

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That then, in brief, is the Cumberland painted by his admirers—a totally different man from the one he represented to the nation in his lifetime. Which was the true Cumberland? The

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vicious, bloodthirsty, proud, cold, sadistic, fiercely ambitious, scheming, spying, self-indulgent mischief-maker, the persecutor of fellow-Christians, the opponent of progress, the enemy of his country, the defiler of men, the raper of defenceless women, the murderer? This man might well have committed the crime against his sister of which he was accused.

Or are we to believe in the kindly, religious, and high-principled man, the decent citizen and honest soldier, the loving husband, the beloved king and the devoted patriot? That man might have been the victim of enemies less worthy than himself; he could never have been guilty of such a crime.

Perhaps it may help us to come to a decision if we recall a story told of the Duke of Cumberland when he was king of Hanover.

The daughter of one of his officers had been expelled from her convent because of a rumour that she had given birth to a child. The event was supposed to have taken place in England while she was visiting her mother. The King ordered an inquiry at once.

In due course the report arrived, and it was sent to the autocratic abbess. It arrived in the middle of the night, in the form of a letter from the King himself, proclaiming the girl's innocence. The letter ended with a stinging reminder from the King, who had himself suffered so direly, so often, and so long, that unsubstantiated accounts could be brought against anyone.

'What would you say, Frau Abbess,' he asked, 'if it were said of you that in earlier years you had given birth to a pair of twins? I would only believe the half of it!'

Are we to believe, then, all we hear of Cumberland the villain—or only half of it? On the other hand, do we quite believe in Cumberland the waxwork angel? Is there no fire beneath the smoke? He was, after all, we remember once again, cordially hated by nearly all who knew him, and by his family not least of all.

We can be fairly sure of only one thing. Whether saint or villain, Cumberland had earned the enmity of powerful political enemies, who whipped up every scandal they could find in the spring of 1829 in order to blacken his name. The story of his being the father of Sophia's son was only one of them. True, it was not born then. The suggestion had had currency since

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1804 at least, when her child was only a few years old, and had perhaps been abroad since his birth. Scandals were all too rife in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, and the royal family was a natural target for gossip—witness the aspersions cast on Sophia's other sisters. By 1829 Byron's own matrimonial troubles, not to mention his *Giaour*, had reminded a public avid for scandalous details that such things happened even in high places. When the Whigs sought to ruin Cumberland, they found to hand two ready-made pieces of slander, the first that he had murdered Sellis, and the second that he had fathered Sophia's son. We should not lose sight of the fact that the Sophia slander was broken on the very day he landed in England, and that when it failed to drive him away and died down, it was followed immediately by a succession of others. Its revival was part of a campaign, a malicious and ruthless political campaign by the Whigs to rid themselves of an enemy whose principles, strong character and outstanding abilities they feared. The *Chronicle* pointed out at the time that Cumberland's friends went so far as to assert that the charge was 'by the stubborn evidence of facts and distances . . . a *physical impossibility*'. It might have been possible to establish a cast-iron and comprehensive alibi of this nature even as late as 1829. Today, of course, the only value this assertion has as evidence is the fact that the Duke's friends were bold enough to make it; but that is something.

Then we should once again remind ourselves (as we did when considering the scandal in its more innocuous form) that the story went forth repeatedly from the court of Princess Caroline of Wales. In close contact with the royal family she may have been, and so in a position to be considered authoritative. That only made her all the more dangerous, for she was undoubtedly a scandalmonger of gargantuan dimensions and even, at times, possibly, a lusty liar. She was certainly one whose bitterness against the whole royal family knew no bounds. There was nothing that the poor, ill-treated, revengeful Princess of Wales, half-crazed with frustrated hatred, would have liked better than to muddy the reputations of the kin of her loathed husband; and with this story she could bespatter the whole family at one throw, as it were. It would be a pity to accept any such tale on her authority, and neither Greville nor Creevey, neither Glenbervie nor Princess Lieven, bring us more than the story.

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On the whole we may not be convinced by the figure of Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, which emerges from the Willis hagiography. We may even find it more plausible on the evidence before us to believe him to have been a thoroughly unpleasant, quarrelsome and crafty person, with a gift for losing friends. We may think him boorish, bigoted and ill-natured—and slimily sentimental too. We may agree with him that he was always unlucky—he wrote ‘*Hélas, il paraît je suis né sous une étoile malheureuse*’—and perhaps unluckiest of all in the misfortune which laid on him, already one-eyed, already a renowned soldier, the burden of the hated name of Cumberland. But, though we cannot prove that he was entirely innocent of the most loathsome charge ever laid at his door, there is plenty of reason to suppose that political malice lay behind the resuscitation of the slander and there is no evidence whatever to convict him of it. We may even go some way towards exculpating him in our hearts if we consider that it may have been a case of the Sellis affair all over again. To no man was the saying, ‘Give a dog a bad name and you may as well hang him’, more applicable than to Ernest, Duke of Cumberland.



## *Conclusion*





## CHAPTER 23

### *Conclusions*

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Now we have come to the end of our quest for information, and we find many questions still unanswered.

What became of Tommy Garth? We do not know. After 1830 there is little trace of him, though the only surviving picture of him, in the home of his uncle's descendants, shows him nine years later in hunting pink, looking substantial and prosperous, on a very nice piece of horseflesh, with a groom standing by with a remount.

We have also a piece of admittedly backstairs gossip, preserved for us by Mr. W. S. Childe-Pemberton. He tells us of stealthy visits paid to Sophia, when, an old lady, totally blind like her father before her, and a little deaf, she lived out her solitary old age in Kensington. Some believe that these visits were the reason why she chose the secluded precincts of Kensington Palace ('dis royal hospital for the decayed and poor royalties', as her sister-in-law called it) after her father's death, rather than live with her beloved brother the Duke of York in South Audley Street, or at St. James's Palace with Augusta, or in some other gayer, more populous place.

'An old female servant, known to the writer, lived when young in the service of Princess Sophia, then advanced in years,' Mr. Childe-Pemberton wrote. 'She spoke gratefully of her royal mistress, never alluding to any scandals which she may have heard. One curious fact, however, she often mentioned.

'At certain times all the servants had strict orders not to enter the Princess's apartments. Her Royal Highness was to be left for a day or two unattended. No questions were asked and no reasons were vouchsafed . . . It was then that the unhappy mother received visits from her son.'

If we can accept this contribution, it may give us a lead as to how Tommy Garth managed to support himself for the rest of

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his days. We cannot know, of course, whether Sir Herbert Taylor, despite his recorded protestations, paid up. If he did not, however, it is hard to believe that the notably kind-hearted Sophia would have failed to take pity on her own son, good-for-nothing or not. Her eldest brother, who had always been good to his sisters, had rescued them as soon as he could from their state of slavish dependence and financial cheese-paring. Sophia, writing from what she called 'The Nunnery' on 12th December 1811 referred gratefully to his 'kindness to *four Old Cats*'—she was only thirty-four—and turned her old gift of mockery upon herself and her skinny body.

'Poor old wretches as we are, a dead weight upon you, old lumber to the country, like old clothes, I wonder you do not vote for putting us in a sack and drowning us in the Thames. Two of us would be fine food for the fishes [Augusta and Elizabeth], and as to Minny and me, we will take our chance together.'

In 1812 the Prince Regent's efforts bore fruit, and the unmarried princesses for the first time in their lives enjoyed incomes of their own, £3,000 each a year—the very figure Tommy Garth had settled on for himself. The ever-generous Sophia did not fail to use her money to benefit her friends, and her brother the Duke of York, that incorrigible gambler, is said to have died owing her £50,000. It is hard to believe that she would not have seen to it that her son also benefited from her private resources.

We do not know, either, what became of the mysterious box, or of the papers in it. My own efforts to trace them have been unavailing, and that has caused me no surprise. We can still only guess at their purport.

We do not know, even now, whether General Garth was the father of Tommy Garth. The General seems on the whole to fit the role of 'cloak' better than that of lover and secret 'husband'.

But cloak for whom? Obviously for a lover who for some reason or other was particularly embarrassing—say a married man, or one of low estate—or else he might have himself played the part allotted to the General and 'married' her secretly.

That thought leads us on a little further. We can readily believe that 'some inferior person' in such a role would be embarrassing to the royal family. We recall the rumour that Sophia's unknown lover was 'a page of the name of Papendyck'.

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Now we do now something of this Papendyck, or Papendiek, as his family spelled it, a member of the Queen's band of chamber music, and a page.

His grand-daughter remembered him as 'handsome, with a fine figure and of great muscular strength', and wrote of 'his great characteristic being his general kind-heartedness and tenderness, especially to women, though he had a hasty, almost passionate temper'.

Papendiek's duties as a page included attendance on the princesses. Pages seem to have been regarded with great, and not altogether unjustified, contempt at the time; they come down to us as an insolent, indolent, petty and grasping, not to say dishonest, lot.

Papendiek was a big, clumsy, genial bear, a German who never lost his accent. At the time of the King's madness in 1788 his physical strength and courage proved of value, though his later disappointment at the material rewards for his devotion somewhat detract from its worth. Part of the pages' duties was to shave the King, and Papendiek dared to do so during the first, frightening onset of his master's dementia—it took him two hours to shave both cheeks, and 'a few days' to clear the mouth and throat, 'conversing pleasantly'. Then, when, on Christmas Day, the King retired under the sofa to commune with his Saviour, Papendiek crawled under it to him, lay there for some time, and 'then by pure strength lifted him in his arms' straight up from the floor, a feat of some moral as well as physical mettle.

Before this, Papendiek had already shewn great perseverance, not to say obstinacy, in pursuing with his attentions a child who was rather repelled by him, and marrying her in the face of her dislike, her father's strong disapproval, a fiancée of his own left behind in his native country, and another lady who appeared to have had prior claims on his affections. It is to his wife, who became Assistant Keeper of the Wardrobe and Reader to Queen Charlotte, and from whose book we have already quoted, that we owe a living picture of him. Mrs. Papendiek's mother seems to have been Mr. Papendiek's only friend in the family, and the strength of her father's nausea towards this bridegroom (he would not look at the trousseau, or inspect the bridal lodging, and at the wedding refused to give the bride away), as well as her own obvious revulsion, seems to hint at a character with

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unpleasant traits. Still, we can only guess at this. Mrs. Papendiek herself struggled always to be dutiful and affectionate, and her heart-sickness might be due to no more than the rebellion of a bovaristic woman married to an unromantic and ungenerous boor.

The possibility that this low fellow Papendiek was the undiscovered lover of the Princess Sophia can only be mooted as light and irresponsible speculation, of course. We have only a single, passing, unsupported reference to go on.

But Papendiek, or another like him, would certainly come under the heading of embarrassing—and thus offer some explanation of the need to employ a cloak such as General Garth to cover up his existence while accounting for the child. He was not, we may notice, merely an 'inferior person' and a very poor one too. He was also a married man. If the worst came to the worst, one can imagine the old Queen thinking, and the family disaster should not remain a secret, then one could produce a General Garth. One could even talk of wedding 'ceremonies' and marriages in the sight of God. The day might even come when, with the old King no longer alive, Sophia might be legally married to General Garth. One could *never* produce a Papendiek.

Another tradition, though supported by nothing more than family legend, deserves passing mention. The Corry family believe that Princess Sophia was married to Isaac Corry, Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer before the Union, who, according to Glenbervie, had 'once acted as a sort of Groom of the bed-chamber to the late Duke of Cumberland', one of George III's brothers.

At least this candidate is prepossessing. Thomas Ashe found that he had 'a very pleasing exterior', and that 'he lost not that advantage by a slovenly neglect of it, but instantly impressed strangers with a favourable opinion of him by the gracefulness of his manner and the unaffected propriety of his deportment'. Glenbervie also found this Corry '*un peu intrigant en politique et en amour*'. He might suit the part, we may think, better than Garth, Cumberland or Papendiek.

Isaac Corry had three children. There is a monument to two of them—Charles McNeill and Selena—in St. Mary Abbots, Kensington, and it has been noticed that neither on that, nor on his own monument in St. Mary's Church, Newry, Co. Down,

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is the name of their mother mentioned. His descendants, through his other daughter Catherine, were convinced that Princess Sophia was their direct ancestress. It is all very slight, however, too slight to be taken seriously. As for the supposed remark of George III's at the time of the Union, that 'Corry was a person of no consequence, but Pitt had said that he must be made easy', well, there are good reasons for using that quotation to disprove and not prove, a connection of the sort.

\* \* \*

It was only after this book had reached the printers that I was able to ask the Garth family what they themselves believed, and was privileged to hear the family secret, never before, it was claimed, revealed to one outside. The descendants of General Garth's naval nephew are emphatic that the General was not the father of Thomas Garth, but acted as a cloak or shield for another man. Visitors to Haines Hill who express curiosity about the horseman in hunting pink framed on a wall are given the crisp reply, 'No relation!' The name of the man whom the family believe to have been his real father, passed down through the generations only by word of mouth, has been told to me—but still as a secret, and not for publication.

Tommy Garth, according to the present generation, had a daughter, a schoolmistress, who never married because, she said, she was so ashamed of her family history. It was from her, I understand, that the family acquired the picture of her father on horseback.

Members of the family point with pride to the silver salver presented to the General by the Regent, and suggest that it is hard to believe that he would have put in charge of his young and flighty daughter a man who had seduced his sister.

Nothing of all this can be considered to be proof, and family legend, however precise, and however interesting, is not of course, conclusive evidence. That perhaps only Tommy's famous lost box of papers could supply, as he said.

\* \* \*

No, we do not know Sophia's secret. We were probably never meant to know it. It is even possible that she never divulged it. She more than once gave it as her opinion that there should not

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be 'allusions to the past', and once, when sympathizing with her niece, Princess Charlotte, in her own romantic tribulations she said: 'I have never betrayed in my life anyone, and still less you who I love so dearly . . .'

So, whether Sophia loved the father of her son or not, she may have kept his name locked in her breast. Perhaps it lies hidden in her dust underneath the solid monument at Kensal Green.

'Her Royal Highness, the Princess Sophia,' runs the inscription, 'fifth daughter of His Majesty King George III, Born November 5th, 1777, Died May 27th, 1848.'

To one side is the text:

'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.'

\* \* \*

So we leave some questions unanswered. We have answered those two with which we set out, however.

The answers to the question, How could they have said such a thing? were, unexpectedly, simple and convincing. We may well decide to dismiss the dreadful charge laid at the door of the Duke of Cumberland as but part of a campaign of slander. We know that the political passions of the day (which ran as strongly in his veins as in those of his opponents), taken in conjunction with his own unfortunate character, could have fully accounted for even so monstrous and unbelievable an occurrence. We need look no further, though we may pause to wonder at the ways of mankind.

The search for an answer to the question, How could such a thing have happened? which referred to the birth of the child Tommy Garth, took us on a long journey. That it was not merely the unhappy result of the work of a moonlight night, as our journalist of Chapter I so fondly assumed, I think we can now claim to understand.

We have traced the dominant characteristics of the Hanoverian monarchs and their sons; we have seen these inherited tendencies operating in George III, and at war with the particular circumstances and influences of his life; we have watched the results in his triumphant struggle to abandon the sweets of romantic self-indulgence for himself, and his consequent rage

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and disappointment at his brothers' marriages. We have seen his urgent determination to prevent further happenings of the same kind, and the way in which he forced through the Royal Marriages Act against the wishes of all. We have noticed the unnatural aversion he had to his daughters being married. We have observed the tremendous effect on all about him of his periodical attacks of insanity. We have realized that, when even a Prime Minister dared not cross his monarch's will during a period of sanity for fear that he might again become unbalanced, the personal and private wishes of his daughters would not carry much weight.

We have seen but too clearly what a ruinous effect this unlucky combination of circumstances had upon the lives of all these daughters, and we can well believe that Princess Caroline of Wales was speaking the truth for once when she said that, caught in so cruel a trap, the poor princesses may have decided to enjoy the solaces of matrimony without its legal benefits. Certainly this may have been the case with Princess Augusta and her Brent Spencer, and with Princess Amelia and her Fitz Roy.

Whether Princess Sophia sought consolation in a form of marriage ceremony, at Puddletown or anywhere else, with General Garth or anyone else, is not really a matter of much moment. The 'marriage' could have had none but a sentimental meaning. Without the King's consent it must have been illegal, and, further, automatically rendered null and void. Whether Sophia was thus 'married', before or after the birth of her child, he would still have been born, and have remained, illegitimate.

More, she must have been well aware of all this, because of the case of her brother, Augustus, Duke of Sussex. His own secret marriage had been declared void, and his children bastardized, six years before the birth of her own son.

There was never any question of Sophia's taking advantage of the escape clause which might have allowed her to appeal to Parliament, even had she wished to do so. Her child was born before she was twenty-five years old. In any case, she would probably have endured almost anything rather than have proceeded to such lengths. Her first object must have been to prevent publicity of a sort which would have been almost certain to unbalance the King. She was one more, in some ways the

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most pathetic, victim of a man who, as Waldegrave once said, would never do wrong save when he mistook wrong for right.

There, I think, we can leave Sophia's story: a cobweb, but a cobweb firmly attached to the rafters of history.

THE END



## *Appendices*

- I. THE ROYAL MARRIAGES ACT TODAY
- II. THE AFFIDAVIT OF CAPTAIN GARTH



## APPENDIX I

### *The Royal Marriages Act Today*

by

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The Royal Marriages Act, 1772 remains on the statute book and most people suppose that it is still in force. But in 1951 I found a legal flaw in the Act whereby it no longer applies to any living member of the Royal Family.<sup>1</sup> Being a legal argument, this is rather a technical one, but the gist of it is not difficult for the non-lawyer to understand. Its practical importance is clear: any princess or prince could, if my contention is correct, marry tomorrow anyone she or he wished without the Queen's having to give her formal consent at a Privy Council meeting, which is the procedure established by the Act. This might be convenient in certain circumstances, e.g. if the proposed spouse was a divorced person or a Roman Catholic, as the Queen's position in the Church of England makes it difficult for Her Majesty (whatever her private feelings) to consent formally to such unions.

It will be remembered that Section I of the Statute enacts that 'no descendant of the body of . . . George II, male or female (*other than the issue of princesses who have married, or may hereafter marry, into foreign families*)' can marry without the Sovereign's consent being first expressed in Council and sealed with the Great Seal. Any 'marriage' ceremony conducted without such consent is made null and void to all intents and purposes. This means, bluntly, that the 'marriage' is no marriage, that the parties are free to marry others (as George IV did after having 'married' Mrs. Fitzherbert), and that any children of it are illegitimate. This last point was held to be good law by the House of Lords in the *Sussex Peerage* case, when the son of the

<sup>1</sup> See my article in the *Modern Law Review*, 1951, pp. 53-63.

Duke of Sussex claimed to succeed to the title. Worse still, all those present—parties, witnesses, officiant, wedding guests—are guilty of the serious crime of *præmunire*, for which they may in theory be imprisoned for life, as well as suffering other penalties.

There is no possible doubt that the Act applied to all George III's children, but it is suggested that the words italicized in the passage quoted from Section I have operated in a rather curious way as a result of cousin-marriages, which the draftsmen of the Act oddly failed to foresee, so as to exempt almost all twentieth-century royalties from the operation of the Act. The exception has 'eaten up' the class of persons made subject to the Act. These persons must fulfil two conditions: (a) be descendants of George II, but also (b) NOT be the issue (i.e. a descendant) of princesses who have married into foreign families. If either element is absent, the Act can not apply to them. I suggest that every living person who comes within (a) fails to come under (b). Thus, e.g. H.R.H. Princess Margaret is a descendant of George II—which brings her within (a), but she *is* descended from several princesses who married into foreign families—which brings her within the exception clause. This is a penal Act, creating a crime and actually passed 'to deprive certain persons of a natural right, a right sanctioned and enforced by the law of both God and Man', as Chief Justice Erle forcibly put it. Hence it must be understood, in case of doubt as to its meaning, in favour of the (theoretical) accused. But in my view there is no such doubt.

The flaw was first mentioned, as one of theory, in 1844, when it was suggested that Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV, was a princess who married into a foreign family—she married Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg—so as to exempt her issue, albeit very near the throne, from the 1772 Act. This was pure theory, as the poor lady died in her first pregnancy. But it was also suggested that had Queen Victoria been a 'princess', and not a 'queen', when she married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg, her issue—which includes all living royalty—would have been exempt on the same principle. This poses the nice problem whether a princess ceases to be a princess when she becomes a Queen. Somehow it seems *lese-majesté* to suggest that Victoria, while emphatically a lady, had ceased to be a princess!

However, if the argument put forward in 1844 is correct—it was never officially accepted or rejected, but just ignored, as

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mine has been—it is not necessary to enter on this indelicate inquiry. Edward VII married his distant kinswoman, Alexandra of Denmark, who, like him, was a descendant of George II, but who, unlike him, was also the descendant of a British princess who had married into a foreign family, being fourth in descent from Princess Louisa of England (1724–51), wife of Frederic V of Denmark. She was thus herself clearly exempt from the Act, but as her ‘issue’ are also the ‘issue’ of Louisa, all British—and foreign—royalty descended from the marriage of Edward and Alexandra must logically be as exempt as she was. Furthermore, Queen Mary, wife of George V, brought in another ground of exemption, for her mother, Princess Mary of Cambridge, had married into the foreign family of Teck. Finally, even our own Queen—though she escaped the mishap of Victoria by marrying while still indubitably a princess—married into a foreign family, for H.R.H. Prince Philip was born one of the Greek royal family, whose dynastic name is the un-English ‘von Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg’. He only changed to ‘Mountbatten’ at his naturalization, which incidentally is irrelevant, as it is the foreignness of the family, not of the individual, which matters. Thus the Duke of Cornwall and Princess Anne are thrice over exempt from the Act, but once in law suffices.

As to those remoter members of the royal family who are not descended from Edward VII, they are almost—if not quite—all exempt on other grounds. All Queen Victoria’s daughters married into foreign families—except Princess Louise, who had no children. Thus their descendants are exempt. This was clearly shown in 1950 when the Marquess of Milford Haven, a descendant of Princess Alice, Victoria’s second daughter, married an American *divorcée* (by a remarkable coincidence called Mrs. Simpson)—naturally without George VI’s consent. Of Victoria’s younger sons, the Duke of Edinburgh left four surviving daughters, all of whom married into foreign families, while the Duke of Albany married a lady who, being descended from a British princess married into a foreign family, brought exemption to her issue. However, when one of these, Miss Anne Abel Smith, recently married, the Queen gave her consent in Council—unnecessarily in my view. The Duke of Connaught was not so fortunate, and so far as I can discover his bride brought no exemption. Of his children, Prince Arthur’s issue is extinct, Princess

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Margaret married the King of Sweden, but Princess Patricia married a Scot. Consequently, her only son, Captain Alexander Ramsay, needed the Queen's consent to his marriage. His children will also need it. We thus reach the absurdity that only this gentleman, who is about *seventieth* in the Line of Succession, now legally needs consent. But if Queen Victoria may be counted as a 'princess' even he is exempt.

This whole argument rests on the proposition that the 1772 Act must be read strictly and literally. It is tempting to argue that the Act's main object being to safeguard the throne from unsuitable marriages, as the Preamble mentions, it should be read as applying to all those near the throne. (Miss Abel Smith is about *eightieth*.) This may be tempting. It is legally impossible. It is for Parliament to make Law in the form of Acts. The courts must just apply those Acts, even if they think them undesirable or peculiar. Further, the Preamble is NOT part of the Act itself and may not be used to contradict clear words in the Sections, although if they are unclear it may be used with due caution to explain them. These rules were dramatically illustrated in the fascinating recent lawsuit of *Prince Ernest of Hanover v. Attorney-General*. The prince, a descendant of George III's son, the Duke of Cumberland, claimed that the Princess Sophia Naturalization Act, 1705, gave British nationality to all the Protestant descendants of Sophia (George I's mother) 'born or hereafter to be born', of whom he was one. Mr. Justice Vaisey ruled that this was 'absurd', and held that some words in the Preamble allowed him to interpret 'hereafter' as being only in the lifetime of Queen Anne, so as to exclude the claimant and four hundred European royalties from being British. But the Court of Appeal overruled his decision, unanimously ruling that even in old Acts clear words in Sections must not be qualified by arguments from the Preamble or from changed circumstances, however radical, but just applied in a straightforward manner. Hence the Prince *was* British. On further appeal, the House of Lords unanimously agreed with this. Thus the highest judicial opinion agrees that Acts must be read literally. Clearly this must be applicable to the 1772 Act. We must read its terms without regard to apparent absurdities (which are Parliament's responsibility), to changes in circumstances since 1772, or to contradictory words—if any; there are none really—in the Preamble.

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Hence my reading of the 1772 Act is not a casuistical quibble, but follows the legal rule of the Hanover precedent. That the draftsmen overlooked the effect of cousin-marriages may be regrettable: if so, Parliament must amend the Act. We may not usurp Parliament's function by altering in the light of our own prejudices its very clear language.

Readers will want to know what has been the reaction to my revolutionary theory since 1951. It has been 'well digested by the Queen's staff', while a former Lord Chancellor has been convinced by at least some of the arguments, but feels that 'the objections to taking action seem at present to outweigh the advantages'. During Princess Margaret's matrimonial crisis in 1955 my theory was widely noted in the Press, not only in England, but in the United States, Australia and Portugal. Many constitutional lawyers accept it. Only one has attempted to refute it. This was Mr. Clive Parry, Fellow of Downing College, Cambridge.<sup>1</sup> First, he thinks that some families which I rely on as foreign were not so, being composed of British subjects due to the 1705 Act. But Louisa's marriage to Frederick V was clearly into a foreign family, as Frederick was not descended from Electress Sophia. Nor was Albert of Saxe-Coburg. Secondly, he repeats the 'absurdity' argument, particularly that 'a reigning British sovereign is within the Act, and must consent to his own marriage under the Great Seal'. As the Court of Appeal pointed out, 'absurdity' is often a matter of opinion. Mr. Justice Vaisey had found 'absurd' matters which the appeal courts found normal. Surely the events of 1936 show it is not at all absurd, but normal, that a monarch needs his Cabinet's consent to his marriage—the Great Seal symbolizes such consent. Practice in 1840—the last Sovereign's marriage—confirms this.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, he makes an alleged antithesis between 'royal family' and 'foreign families', which is admittedly derived from the Preamble—a reference to which the House of Lords has now held to be impermissible where the enacting words are clear. Even if this strange antithesis were acceptable, it would lead to

<sup>1</sup> See his article 'Further Considerations on the Prince of Hanover's Case' in the *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, 1957, pp. 61 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Victoria describes in her diary how it was thought necessary to summon the whole Privy Council to hear of her betrothal to Albert. But on another legal argument, the Queen is not bound by an Act unless mentioned in it. The 1772 Act does not mention the Sovereign as being bound. Perhaps, then, the Sovereign is exempt.

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far more 'absurd' results than any Mr. Parry supposes my theory to produce. He says that 'if a female member of [the royal] family (other than the reigning sovereign) marries into a "foreign family" she necessarily ceases to be a member of the "royal family" though, should she subsequently succeed to the Crown, she returns and her issue are brought within the "royal family"'.<sup>1</sup> This presumably means that the heiress to the throne begins life as one of the 'royal family', ceases to be so on her marriage into a 'foreign family' (of which the present Queen's marriage into a Greek family would be an example), then has issue not within the Act (e.g. Charles and Anne), then becomes 'royal family' again as Queen, and has further issue within the Act. Thus the elder issue (nearer the throne) would be exempt, the junior within the Act. Or can one jump from being within the exempting words 'issue of a princess who marries into a foreign family' back into the words 'descendant of George II'? Mr. Parry apparently overlooked the fact that it is this phrase and not 'royal family' which is used in the Act. Besides, if one can so jump, it may still be absurd. If George VI had lived, Prince Charles might have married in his lifetime. His mother being still stuck in a 'foreign family' (on Mr. Parry's own argument), he would not have needed any royal consent, while if Princess Anne had married after George VI's death she would have needed it!

Why spell out all this complexity from the Preamble when the Act states very clearly in Section I who is, and who is not, within its terms? The fact that the latter class has now 'eaten up' the former one and so blots out the Act from practical use is just such a later accidental circumstance as the House of Lords told us may not be relied upon. It is for Parliament to reform the law as to royal marriages. Events in 1955 suggest that this is badly needed. But we may not try to supply the deficiency by 'interpreting' the 1772 Act in a way directly contrary to the Hanover ruling. A sensible and straightforward reading of Section I can only lead to one conclusion: that the Royal Marriages Act is quite dead.

<sup>1</sup> He exempts, too, male members becoming foreign rulers, but this is contrary to the Act. Why should the Duke of Cumberland's having become King of Hanover exempt his issue? The present Hanover family are exempt, however, being descended from an exempting princess.



## APPENDIX II

### *Singular Affidavit in Chancery*

IN CHANCERY—BETWEEN THOMAS GARTH, ESQ.,  
PLAINTIFF; AND SIR HERBERT TAYLOR, KNIGHT  
COMMANDER OF THE BATH, SIR JOHN DEAN PAUL,  
AND CHARLES MOLLOY WESTMACOTT, GENTS.,  
DEFENDANTS

Thomas Garth, of Melton Mowbray, in the county of Leicester, Esquire, a Captain on half-pay in His Majesty's Army, the above-named deponent, maketh oath and saith, that he was, in the month of November last, in possession of, and rightfully entitled to, certain documents, papers, and correspondence, of very great value and importance, relating immediately to his fortune, station, and affairs, and to the claims which he had upon certain persons named in such documents and correspondence, and to the mode by which such claim could be substantiated and enforced.

And this deponent further saith, that he was also, at the above-mentioned period, indebted to several persons in various sums of money, amounting in the whole to a very considerable sum, and that Lieut.-General Sir Herbert Taylor, of St. Katherine's Lodge, Regent's Park, in the county of Middlesex, Knight Commander of the Bath, one of the above-named defendants, was very desirous of obtaining possession of the above-mentioned documents and correspondence, or, at any rate, of having the same so securely deposited in safe custody, that neither this deponent nor any other person should without his, the said Sir Herbert Taylor's assent, obtain access thereto, and that the said Herbert Taylor entered into a negotiation with this deponent for that purpose.

And this deponent further saith, that it was ultimately, as this deponent hath been informed and verily believes, agreed by and on the part of the said Sir Herbert Taylor, and on the part of this

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deponent, at a meeting held at his house, on or about Thursday, the 20th day of November last, to the effect and in the manner following:

That is to say, by and on the part of the said Sir Herbert Taylor, that all the then outstanding debts of this deponent should be discharged by or by the direction of the said Sir Herbert Taylor, and that an annuity of 3,000 l. per annum should be effectually secured to this deponent for his life; and that by and on the part of this deponent, that the box containing all the above-mentioned documents, letters, and correspondence, should be sealed with the respective seals of this deponent and the said Sir Herbert Taylor, and, so sealed, should be deposited in the hands of some banker or bankers, to be agreed upon by the said Sir Herbert Taylor and this deponent, whilst the proper securities for securing the due payment of the said annuity of 3,000 l. per annum, which was to commence from the period when the said box should have been so deposited, were being prepared, and until the completion and execution thereof; but should be re-delivered to this deponent, in case any failure should take place in carrying into full and complete effect and execution on the part of the said Sir Herbert Taylor the terms of the above-mentioned agreement.

And it was thereby, as the deponent hath also been informed, and verily believes, agreed by the said Sir Herbert Taylor, and on the behalf of this deponent, that after the said debts of this deponent had been discharged, and the grant and securities of and for the annuity should have been executed, the said box, with its contents, should remain in the hands of some banker or bankers to be mutually agreed upon, in the names of two trustees, one to be appointed by and on the part of the said Sir Herbert Taylor, and the other by and on the part of his deponent, as a security for the due and punctual payment of the said annuity to this deponent.

And this deponent further saith, that shortly, and, as this deponent believes, the day next after the above agreement had been entered into, this deponent, believing that the same would be as it ought to have been carried into full and final execution on the said Sir Herbert Taylor's part, without hesitation or delay, did, in order to carry into effect the above-mentioned terms, on the part of this deponent, take with him the box,

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containing all the said papers, documents, and correspondence, to the house of Charles Molloy Westmacott, of Adam Street, Adelphi, in the county of Middlesex, gentleman, one other of the above-named defendants, and who then professed to be a friend of this deponent, but which said Charles Molloy Westmacott had not any title to, or interest in, any of the said papers, documents, or correspondence, or in the said box, in any manner whatever.

And this deponent further saith, that upon the occasion above-mentioned, he, this deponent, met the said Sir H. Taylor at the house of the said Charles Molloy Westmacott by appointment, and that this deponent, who had then and there with him the key of the said box, then and there opened the same, and in the presence of the said Sir Herbert Taylor, for the purpose of verifying the fact that the said papers, correspondence, and documents, above referred to, were then contained in such box, as in fact they then were, and this deponent having then and there taken up the same out of the said box, and shown them to the said Sir Herbert Taylor, replaced them in the said box, and locked the same in the presence of the said Sir Herbert Taylor.

And this deponent further saith, that after such papers, correspondence, and documents had been so replaced, and the said box so locked, such box was then and there tied round with tape, and sealed with the respective seals of the said Sir Herbert Taylor and this deponent, and also with the seal of the said Charles Molloy Westmacott, as a friend of this deponent, but that the key of the said box was, with the assent of the said Sir Herbert Taylor, retained by this deponent, for the purpose of more fully manifesting that this deponent was entitled to the repossession of the said box and its contents, in case the above-mentioned agreement should not be fully and duly performed and perfected.

And this deponent further saith, that after the said box had been so locked and sealed, it was agreed between this deponent and the said Sir Herbert Taylor, that the same should provisionally, and for immediate safe custody as aforesaid, be deposited in the hands of Sir John Dean Paul, Bart., Robert Snow, and John Dean Paul, all of the Strand, in the city of Westminster, bankers and copartners, others of the above-named defendants,

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who it was proposed should receive the same as a deposit, made in the joint names of Sir Herbert Taylor and Charles Molloy Westmacott, and should give two receipts for the same, one of such receipts to be given to the said Sir Herbert Taylor, and the other of them to the said Charles Molloy Westmacott, but it was at the same time expressly understood by all the said parties, that the name of the said Charles Molloy Westmacott should be so used, and such last-mentioned receipt should be so given to the said Charles Molloy Westmacott, as an agent for and on behalf of this deponent.

And this deponent further saith, that the reason, and the only reason alleged or suggested against such receipt being given to this deponent directly, and in favour of such use of the said Charles Molloy Westmacott's name, was lest some colour or countenance should be thereby given to certain rumours then supposed to exist respecting the nature of certain documents and papers supposed to be in the possession of this deponent.

And this deponent further saith, that immediately after the said last-mentioned meeting had taken place, and in the faith that the said agreement would be fully performed by the said Sir Herbert Taylor, he (this deponent) proceeded, and, as this deponent believes, on or about the 24th day of November, 1828, in company with the said Charles Molloy Westmacott, to the banking-house of the said Sir John Dean Paul & Company, and there, on the same day, in pursuance of the said agreement, on his part, delivered the said box, with its contents, into their custody, the joint names of the said Sir Herbert Taylor and Charles Molloy Westmacott; and they, the said bankers, thereupon, on the same day, gave two receipts for the same to the said Charles Molloy Westmacott, who retained one of such receipts as the agent of, and on the behalf of, this deponent, and delivered the other of them to the said Sir Herbert Taylor.

And this deponent further saith, that shortly after this, deponent caused a list of his debts to be furnished to the said Sir Herbert Taylor, at his request, in order that the same might be liquidated, in pursuance of the said agreement; and this deponent was in full hope and expectation that the said agreement would, as well in that as in all other respects, have been fully and duly performed.

But this deponent saith, that no sum of money whatever hath

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in fact been paid to this deponent since the said deposit so obtained, as aforesaid, upon the faith of the due performance of the said agreement; nor have any securities been, as this deponent believes, ever prepared, or attempted to be prepared, nor have any of the debts due from this deponent been in fact liquidated or discharged, and the said Sir Herbert Taylor denies that he is bound to form the agreement as hereinbefore, and in the said bill set forth.

And this deponent further saith, all authority and power, therefore, given to the said Charles Molloy Westmacott to act as the agent of this deponent, or in any respect on his behalf, was, previously to the 23rd day of December last, absolutely revoked and countermanded; and that such revocation of authority was communicated to the said Sir Herbert Taylor by this deponent, in a letter of the 23rd day of December, 1828, in the words and figures, or to the purport and effect in the said bill of complaint set forth.

And this deponent further saith, that he received from the said Sir Herbert Taylor, in answer to the said last-mentioned letter, such letter as in the said bill is mentioned to bear date the 24th day of December, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-eight; and that the said Sir Herbert Taylor well knows that the said Charles Molloy Westmacott was merely the agent of this deponent, and that such agency has been revoked and has ceased, and that the said Charles Westmacott is not now and has not been since the twenty-third day of December last, in any respect the agent of this deponent; and this deponent further saith he believes that the same Charles Molloy Westmacott intends to join with the said Sir Herbert Taylor in demanding the said box and its contents; and that the said Sir Herbert Taylor and Charles Molloy Westmacott, respectively, have the said receipts in their possession and that they intend to present the same and to demand and receive the said box and contents, and to prevent this deponent from regaining possession thereof.

And this deponent saith, that the said box and its contents are his absolute property, subject only to the due performance of the said agreement, on the part of the said Sir Herbert Taylor; and that the said Sir Herbert Taylor repudiates the said agreement, which, however, he, this deponent insists, ought to be duly and faithfully performed according to the terms hereinbefore set

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forth, which were the terms upon which alone this deponent ever authorized or sanctioned any agreement for the delivering up of the said box and its contents.

THOMAS GARTH

Sworn at my house, No. 7, John Street, Berkeley Square, in the county of Middlesex, this 28th day of Feb. 1829,

Exd 5th March, 1829

—*J. W. Farren.*

From *The Times*, March 14, 1829.

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